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*LECTURES ON THE
REVELATION OF ST JOHN.*



LECTURES
ON THE
REVELATION OF ST JOHN.

BY
C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.
MASTER OF THE TEMPLE.

THIRD EDITION.



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PREFACE.

THESE Volumes contain a series of Lectures on *the Revelation of St John* delivered in the years 1861 and 1862 in the Parish Church of Doncaster. A similar work published last Autumn on *the Epistle to the Philippians* will have prepared my readers for the plan here pursued.

It may be necessary just so far to repeat what was stated in the Preface to those Lectures as to explain that the English Translation¹ prefixed to each Discourse is not offered as a substitute for that contained in the Authorized Version, but only as a literal representation of the idiom of the original text, designed to assist the understanding of the commentary which follows.

There are those who can rest with satisfaction in a more vague and popular exposition of the language of Holy Scripture. The attempt to render intelligible to an unlearned congregation the accuracies of the sacred language, and to draw a meaning not always visible on the surface from shades and turns and niceties of expression, will appear doubtless to such persons a waste of labour, if not a distraction of the attention from matters of vital and saving import. Others have learned a different and (as I venture to think) a truer lesson from the experience of interest awakened, and thought quickened, and reverence heightened, and humility deepened, even in the minds of

¹ These translations are made from Tischendorf's 2nd Edition, Leipsic, 1849.

common men, by that closer and more discriminating investigation of the utterances of Divine Truth which has been attempted, earnestly though most imperfectly, in the work now offered to the Church.

The impression left by every such effort upon the person who makes it will, I believe, be twofold. He will find in himself a growing sense of the reality of Inspiration; an increased and at last unassailable conviction of the dignity and the power and the elevation of that thing (define it as he may) which distinguishes Holy Scripture in kind as well as in degree from the highest achievement of human intellect or genius. And he will perceive also that that Divine impulse is of a plastic not a rigid character, rather pervading than overbearing the manifold capacities and energies of the human writer, insomuch that it is the very man himself knowing and feeling and thinking and speaking, and yet in all this guided and animated and *moved by the Holy Ghost*.

In reference to that particular Book which is the subject of the present work, it cannot be but that the former of these results should predominate over the latter. In proportion as the matter treated of lies above the region of natural discovery, the Divine element must rise and the human element must sink in the composition. As in some of the Epistles of the New Testament the man, so here of necessity the inspired man will come most prominently into view. And yet even here it is John, *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, whose character tinges the whole work with its own peculiar lustre of saintly love.

In the study of this Divine Book I have availed myself of such helps as I possess—they are of the commonest kind—towards its interpretation. It has appeared to me that this part of Dean Alford's elaborate work on the Greek Testament is the most valuable and instructive of his contributions to the sacred literature of our age. Dean Trench's *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches* had not yet been published when that portion of the Book was under my consideration. The human Author to whom I owe most in regard to this labour—without whom indeed I should probably not have undertaken it—is Hengstenberg, with whose Exposition of the Revelation of St John I became acquainted some ten years ago through a translation published in Clark's *Foreign Theological Library* for 1851 and 1852. To him I owe much, very much, both of the general and of the particular treatment here adopted. His very language has now and then, I doubt not, incorporated itself unawares in mine; while a few pregnant clauses, full of wisdom and faith, are introduced here and there from his work with marks of quotation. In the first three chapters of the Apocalypse I have made no use of him; in some important sections I have diverged from him widely: I would that any portion of his devout spirit, his scriptural knowledge, and his pathetic expression, might be found reflected in the pages of the work which follows.

I have refrained from entering into any introductory exposition of the system of interpretation here pursued. A system of interpretation should be rather

an inference than a theory; an inference of the reader as much as of the writer; a deduction made by himself, and not a programme of conclusions already reached by another. I shall be well contented to be thought deficient in comprehensive ideas, if I may assist others in the formation of a right judgment upon the actual utterances of the *sure word of Prophecy* itself.

And now I would dedicate my work, with its manifold imperfections, to the beloved Church of England, as a contribution, poor and inadequate, to her Divine ministry as *a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ*; with the humble prayer that in this as in all her offices she may be kept faithful to her high trust, holding an even way between diverging extravagances, and commending the truth, alike by its beauty, by its wisdom, and by its strength, *to every man's conscience in the sight of God*.

THE VICARAGE, DONCASTER,
May 19, 1863.

In this third Edition the literal translations are no longer prefixed to the Lectures. They will still be found interwoven in the body of the Lectures themselves. The marginal references are now placed at the foot of the page; and a few passages have been omitted, which had only a local or passing interest. The whole has been carefully revised, but without any material change.

THE TEMPLE,
December 9, 1869.

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OF THE
BOOK OF REVELATION.

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LECTURE I.

REVELATION I. 12, 13.

And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man.

I PURPOSE to call your attention on some future occasions to those brief Epistles to the seven Churches of Asia Minor, which are contained in the second and third chapters of the Revelation of St John. May God grant His blessing to our study of them! May He *open our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures*¹, and our hearts to receive the things which are spoken!

To-night we must say something in the way of preface; something of the human writer, and of his circumstances; something of the Divine Author, and of the character in which He thought it good here to reveal Himself. The application of the whole to ourselves will be found in the few words read as the text.

¹ Luke xxiv. 45.

Sermons on the Book of Revelation are too often regarded as visionary and fantastic. Parts of the book are difficult of interpretation: perhaps the key which is to unlock them is not yet in the hands of man. But it will be. And meanwhile we ought to study the book itself, and become so imbued with its general spirit as not to be unaware of the fulfilment from mere ignorance of the prophecy. For doubtless it is more than conceivable that a very marked and certain fulfilment of a prophecy might be overlooked and unnoticed by those who had never turned their attention to the language in which the prophecy itself was expressed. The book itself opens with an emphatic benediction upon its students. *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand*¹.

And if there are some things dark in this prophecy, there are more things plain. Even in the darkest parts there is already a glimmering light. Already we can see a clear testimony running through it to the holiness of God, to the power of Christ, to the providence which is working in or overruling all things, to the divine purpose which all things and all men are willingly or unwillingly subserving, and to that final triumph of good over evil, of Christ over Antichrist, of God over Satan, which will be the last and most decisive justification of the ways of God to men. All this lies on the surface of the book. And I know not that a more profitable occupation could be found for men of the world—men

¹ Rev. i. 3.

of business, men of activity, men of intelligence and influence—than the repeated perusal of a part of God's Word which says to them, even in its most obscure and mysterious disclosures, God is at work, God has a purpose, God will at length manifest His reign, in this world which you treat too much for the present as if it were all your own. Take heed that you be not disregarding, that you be not *even fighting against God*¹, and destined therefore to be overthrown when He triumphs. I know not that there is one chapter of this Book which does not enforce upon us this great lesson.

And surely we need not speak of its lessons for a very different class. We need not say what its opening chapters and what its closing chapters are to the suffering, to the solitary, to the sick and the dying. They have a voice certainly for these, if they are ever silent to the prosperous or to the self-confident.

We will endeavour so to speak upon that part of the Book of Revelation which is proposed for our consideration here, as that the word uttered shall be undeniably *a word of truth and soberness*². God help us to make it so!

Let us read the Preface to the Book, as it stands in the sacred page itself.

*A revelation*³ *of Jesus Christ*. A revelation is an unveiling or uncovering of an object before hidden. That object may be either a thing or a person. In two successive verses of one chapter of the Epistle to the Romans we read of revelation of a future glory, and of a revelation of those for whom that glory is destined. /

¹ Acts v. 39.

² Acts xxvi. 25.

³ Verse 1.

*reckon that the sufferings of the present season are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed unto (upon) us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation—but the word is the same, the revelation—of the sons of God*¹. Thus the same book of prophecy which is a revelation of things future may be also called a revelation of Him who is *the author and the finisher*², the origin and the end, of all.

Which God gave Him. Even in heaven the words of the Gospel are still true, *The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth*³. Every revelation of God's counsels comes to man from the Father through the Son.

The object of this particular revelation is then stated. *To show to His servants things which must come to pass speedily.* It is a disclosure of the divine counsels with reference to the future course and final destiny of the Church and of the world.

*And*⁴ He, God Himself, *signified* it, this revelation, *sending by His angel, to His servant John, who testified the word of God* thus communicated to him, *and the testimony* thus borne by the Father *of (concerning) Jesus Christ*⁵, *even all things that he saw.* The general purport of all the visions vouchsafed to the Apostle in the scenes which follow was a testimony borne by God Himself to His Son Jesus Christ.

*Blessed*⁶ *is he that readeth, and blessed are they that hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things that are*

¹ Rom. viii. 18, 19.

² Heb. xii. 2.

³ John v. 20.

⁴ Verse 2.

⁵ Compare 1 John v. 9, 10.

⁶ Verse 3.

written in it: for the season of their accomplishment is near. A prophecy, in the Scriptural sense of that term, is any communication made by man to men under the inspiration of God. But here the nature of the communication makes it, in large measure, what we more commonly understand by the word prophecy, a prediction of things to come.

John¹ to the seven congregations in Asia. The enumeration which presently follows of the Churches designed shows that Asia is here used in its narrowest sense; not of the quarter of the globe so denominated, not even of Asia Minor, but of one province on the western side of that country, expressly distinguished in two well-known passages of the Acts of the Apostles² from Cappadocia and Pontus, from Phrygia and Pamphylia, from Galatia, Mysia, and Bithynia.

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who cometh, the self-existent, eternal, ever-living God; *and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne³,* the Holy and Blessed Spirit whose gifts are diffused through all the Churches; *and⁴ from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness—who speaks that He doth know, and testifies that He hath seen⁵—the firstborn of the dead⁶,* the first-fruits of the universal resurrection⁷, *and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*

To Him who loveth us, and washed us from our sins in

¹ Verse 4.

² Acts ii. 9, 10. xvi. 6, 7.

³ Compare Rev. iv. 5.

⁴ Verse 5.

⁵ John iii. 11.

⁶ Compare Col. i. 18.

⁷ 1 Cor. xv. 20.

*His blood, and*¹ *who made us a kingdom, a royal race, a body and a house of kings, priests to God His Father*², *to Him who is both God and also the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Him be the glory and the power unto the ages: Amen.*

*Behold*³—such is the very frontispiece of the prophecy which is to follow—such the crowning event to which all else in history and in prophecy is pointing and leading on—*Behold, He cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, yea, and whosoever they were who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth, once His rejecters and blasphemers, shall wail over Him. They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, as the Prophet Zechariah wrote of old, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn*⁴. *Yea, Amen:* the thing is true, and the will of God is the will of His people.

*I am*⁵ *Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, saith the Lord (Jehovah) God, who is and who was and who cometh, the Almighty. I am the Lord, I change not*⁶: I ever live, to make good my word.

And now we are to hear more of the human writer, and more of the Divine Author, of the book open before us.

The human writer was the great Apostle and Evangelist St John. He had reached now a late point in his long pilgrimage. At this time he was a banished man.

¹ Verse 6.

² Compare Rev. v. 10. ¹ Pet. ii. 9.

³ Verse 7.

⁴ Zech. xii. 10.

⁵ Verse 8.

⁶ Mal. iii. 6.

The storm of persecution had broken upon him in his gentle and steadfast ministry at Ephesus, and had driven him to the little island of Patmos for the testimony of the truth. In that solitude, however, he was not alone. Shut out as he now was from all Christian converse, he was only the more fitted for converse with Christ. Debarred by no fault of his own from all Christian ordinances, expelled from that congregation in which for so long, day after day, he had uttered the message of truth and the call of love, he was admitted now to worship in the very sanctuary above, and to receive if he might no longer give instruction from the lips of the Divine Master Himself. It is not in days of abounding comfort and engrossing occupation, even if it be occupation for Christ, even if it be comfort in the society of Christian people, that the soul is most accessible to the visitation of Christ Himself. It is when earthly coverings are stripped off, it is when little can be done and less enjoyed, it is when quiet has passed into loneliness, and leisure into enforced inaction, that Christ Himself draws nigh, and says, *Fear not: for I am with thee*¹. It was so with St John. *I John*², *your brother, and fellow-partner in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Christ Jesus, became in (came to) the island which is called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. And there I became*³ *in spirit on the Lord's day.* On that day of the week which from the memory of Christ's resurrection had already become the chosen festival of His disciples; that day which He had Himself more than once selected for His own

¹ Isai. xliii. 5.² Verse 9.³ Verse 10.

appearance to them between Resurrection and Ascension¹; that day which His Apostles expressly honoured as the day of the Church's offerings and of the chief *breaking of bread* in the ordinance of Communion²; on that same day on which we are now assembled, according to the rule of many centuries, for prayer and praise and exhortation, St John was, in a special sense, *in spirit*; his very bodily and mental existence was as it were merged and lost in the spiritual; he was placed under the direct and peculiar agency of the Holy Spirit; not only influenced by Him, as he always was, for instruction and guidance and comfort, but so actuated and possessed by Him as to be, like St Paul on an occasion of which he has left us the record, *caught up to the third heaven*, and privileged to *hear unspeakable words which it was not lawful for a man to utter*³.

In this state of ecstasy and of inspiration, he heard behind him, first of all, *a loud voice as of a trumpet*, a voice speaking with all the clearness and emphasis of a trumpet's tone, and directing him⁴ to keep a record of certain things which were about to be shown to him, and then to transmit them to seven different congregations in some of the chief towns of Asia Minor. To St John and to the first readers of this book the names of these places were just as familiar as the names of seven towns of our own country or of our own county at this day would be to us; and it gives us a startling sense of the reality and nearness to this earth of the

¹ John xx. 19, 26.

² Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4.

⁴ Verse 11.

risen Saviour, to hear of His sending an actual message with the living voice to living men, characterizing the present state of each, and adapting to it some precise word of reproof, of encouragement, and of admonition.

And thus we pass from the writer to the Author; from the messenger to the Sender; from the beloved Apostle to the Divine Saviour Himself, in whose name and by whose authority St John spoke and wrote on earth, and whose own words we may still read in these seven Epistles to the Asiatic Churches.

None can fail to be impressed by the manifestation here made of the risen life and (we may add) of the risen mind of Jesus. It seems to have been one object of the inspired Word to teach us how much and how little of change passed over Him in the final transition from earth to heaven. The great change was not in Ascension but in Resurrection. Ascension was a change of place; Resurrection was a change of state. What Jesus was when He appeared to His disciples on the evening of the first Easter Day, that and none other He is still. When St Stephen in the near prospect of His last sufferings *looked up stedfastly into heaven, and by faith beheld the glory that shall be revealed*¹, he was able, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to recognize Jesus the Son of Man in the Person standing on the right hand of God. When Saul in his journey drew near Damascus, and a light brighter than the noonday sun revealed to him the presence of that Sa-

¹ Acts vii. 55. Collect for St Stephen's Day.

viour whose cause upon earth he had set himself to destroy, still the words which he heard were those of the very same Jesus who had once taught and suffered on earth; there was the same care for the sorrows of the afflicted, and the same identification of Himself with the interests and with the very persons of His redeemed. *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? ... I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*¹. Was it not still the very same Person who had said on earth, *He that receiveth you receiveth me*²—*Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother*³—*Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*⁴?

And yet in this vision of the Son of Man⁵ vouchsafed to the beloved disciple in his solitude in Patmos, there was something more of terror. It was a vision: in that one word lies the explanation. There was a disclosure of righteous displeasure to be made to some of His earthly congregations, and even for the rest the message was from the Judge. It was not only the compassionate Saviour suffering in the sufferings of his disciples, who was here to be seen and heard. Rather it was the Son of Man as He shall hereafter take His seat *on the throne of His glory*, and cause to be gathered *before Him all the nations*⁶. His garment⁷ was now the long and ample robe of judicial, of kingly power. The

¹ Acts ix. 4, 5.² Matt. x. 40.³ Matt. xii. 50.⁴ Matt. xxv. 40.⁵ Verse 12.⁶ Matt. xxv. 31.⁷ Verse 13.

hair of His head¹ was white with the blinding splendour of His holiness and of His glory. His eyes were as a flame of fire, searching in their discernment, and consuming in their judgment. His feet² were like the fine brass burning in a furnace; denoting at once an unwearied endurance and a resistless strength. *And His voice as the sound of many waters*; that utterance so impressive, so majestic, so all-pervading, as we have heard it sometimes on the shore of the Ocean, which is audible through and above all other sounds, reducing them to feebleness without caring to silence or to overbear them. Even such is Christ's voice amongst the many voices of earth. Amidst their loudest tones He is instantly audible at His pleasure: at His pleasure He says to them, *Peace, be still*³, and they cease instantly, and there is a great calm.

*And*⁴ *having in His right hand seven stars*, afterwards explained as denoting *the angels*, that is, the rulers or chief pastors, *of the seven churches* already named. *And out of His mouth there was a two-edged sharp sword going forth*; the emblem of that Word of God which is called *the sword of the Spirit*⁵, and said to be *quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart*⁶. It is from the mouth of Jesus that every word of God proceeds, whether it be a word of conviction or of con-

¹ Verse 14.² Verse 15.³ Mark iv. 39.⁴ Verse 16.⁵ Eph. vi. 17.⁶ Heb. iv. 12.

solation, of mercy or of judgment. *And His countenance was as the sun when he shineth in his power; even so dazzling, even so confounding to the gaze of man.*

And was this He whom upon earth St John had known so familiarly? Was this He in whose bosom he had lain at that last supper, and said, *Lord, which is he that betrayeth Thee*¹? *When*² *I saw Him* thus, thus transformed, thus glorified, *I fell at His feet as one dead.* Well might such be the effect, even upon the *spirit of a just man made perfect*³—and St John was still in the body—of such an open revelation of the risen glory of Christ. But *He laid His right hand upon me*—that hand of strength and of blessing which St John had last seen uplifted in the Ascension, when, *while He blessed them, He was parted from them and carried up into heaven*⁴—saying, *Fear not: I am the first and the last; I am He who hath neither beginning of days nor end of life*⁵; they that trust in me trust in One who cannot fail nor forsake them, but is *the same yesterday and to-day and for ever*⁶. But more still than this. *And*⁷ *the living One; and I became dead: blessed words! I once tasted death for every man*⁸; once hung upon the cross, *bearing the sin of the world*⁹; once knew pain and torture and desertion, desertion of man and of God, and cried in the extremity of anguish, *My God,*

¹ John xxi. 20.² Verse 17.³ Heb. xii. 23.⁴ Luke xxiv. 51.⁵ Heb. vii. 3.⁶ Heb. xiii. 8.⁷ Verse 18.⁸ Heb. ii. 9.⁹ John i. 29.

*my God, why hast Thou forsaken me*¹? once bowed the dying head, even like unto the sons of men, and said, *It is finished*²—*Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit*³; once filled a mortal tomb, and descended, like the spirits of the faithful, into the Hades of the departed⁴. *I became dead; and behold, I am living unto the ages of the ages*: raised from the dead, I die no more: *death hath no more dominion over me*⁵: the last enemy is destroyed⁶ for me, and shall surely be so for all who are mine. *And I have the keys of death and of Hades*. In my hand are the keys which unlock the gates of death and the grave: when I shut, no man openeth; when I open, none can shut⁷.

*Write*⁸ *then the things which thou sawest*; describe this vision, for the Church's instruction, warning, and comfort; tell to its latest generations what I am now in the heavenly places; what in glory, what in mind and in will, what in the recollection of the past, what in the purposes of the future. Write too *the things which are*, those eternal unchangeable verities which have been or which shall be disclosed to thee. Write also *the things which are about to be (become) after these things*; those wonderful scenes of the Church of the future, and of the world of the future, which are about to pass in bright yet mysterious procession before thee, and of which though *thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter*⁹ the secret meaning and the sure ful-

¹ Matt. xxvii. 46.² John xix. 30.³ Luke xxiii. 46.⁴ Psalm^l xvi. 10.⁵ Rom. vi. 9.⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 26.⁷ Rev. iii. 7.⁸ Verse 19.⁹ John xiii. 7.

filment. In the meantime let one fragment of the vision be explained to thee, since the Church of the present needs it for her admonition and for her consolation. *The secret¹ of the seven stars which thou sawest upon my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven congregations; and the seven candlesticks are seven congregations.*

Thus then we have reached the point selected as our special word for this evening. *Being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man.* As it is said in the following chapter, *These things saith He...who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks².* And now we have read that the seven candlesticks amongst which He thus walks are the seven churches, the seven congregations.

The congregations specially concerned in this vision were seven in number. They were then planted in populous towns, and they had Apostles for their founders, Apostles for their visitors, yes, Apostles for their pastors. Where are they now? Blotted from the very face of the earth. The warning uttered here to some of them was little regarded: for their sins they were cut off, and their candlesticks one after another were removed out of their place.

Yet has Christ His congregations still, and He is to them just what He was, as much as He ever was, to the Asiatic churches. Amongst the golden candlesticks—and the church of this town is one of them—Christ

¹ Verse 20.

² Rev. ii. 1.

walks still. The congregation here assembled, He is in the midst of it.

This is the one thought which I designed to leave with you this evening. *I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man*, yes, the Son of Man, the Son of God, Himself.

What is the candlestick? It is the church, it is the congregation, it is the Christian body, in a particular town. It is not only, though it be chiefly and most prominently, in its worship that Christ is thus present in it. He is walking in the church, that is, the professedly Christian body, in this town, at all times and in all places; on every day of the week, and in all the various scenes, private or public, in which any one of all that body moves, acts, and lives. Do not suppose that, if we are decorous in our worship when we meet here together, that is all that the great *Shepherd and Bishop of our souls*¹ requires or indeed sees in us. Do not suppose that then only are you a church, in the Scripture sense of that word, when you are gathered for prayer and praise. Do not suppose that it is left with you to have Christ walking among you, or not so walking, at your pleasure, by frequenting or else *forsaking* that *assembling of ourselves together*² to which the promise of His presence is specially guaranteed. No; whether here or there, whether in the church or in the family, whether in the secret chamber or in the market-place, whether in the shrine of the heart or in the commerce and contact of men, in all places alike, and at all times equally, Christ

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 25.

² Heb. x. 25.

is present amongst us: we, we collectively, are one of His golden candlesticks, and amongst those golden candlesticks, whether seven in number, or (as now) more than seven thousand times seven, He, the Son of Man, He, the Son of God, is evermore walking and taking account.

And we shall see at each step as we advance through the affecting and heart-stirring addresses which follow, that Christ, who is thus present in His congregations, is able to characterize each of them not individually only but collectively. As each one of us separately, so all of us together bear a certain stamp and colour before Him. He can say whether the church of this town is in a healthy state or a sickly state; whether the Christian community as a whole is living in faith and hope and charity, or not so living; whether there is a deadness in it spiritually, or a spiritual vitality: whether there are any sins specially defiling and polluting it—sins practised by some and too little regarded by the rest—sins of prevailing worldliness, sins of inconsistency, sins of strife and uncharitableness, sins of ungodliness, sins of sensuality, sins of intemperance and lust, sins of spiritual idolatry; or whether this be one of those communities against which Christ *has* but *a few things*, in which at all events He can tell of much *charity and faith and patience*, and of *the last works as more than the first*¹.

These are some of the thoughts which ought to be stirring within us as we read the brief summary presented in the text, and to which the contemplation of the sepa-

¹ Rev. ii. 19.

rate Epistles to the seven churches ought to give week by week an added force and fulness.

O how shall I, God helping me, carry into the hearts and consciences of this congregation the solemn and edifying voice of this night's subject? Much do we need it. *Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*¹. O where is the sign of His coming? It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, I see the white cloud descending, and one sitting upon it, whose form is like the Son of Man. It is not on earth, that thou shouldest say, *Lo, here is Christ, or, Lo, He is there*². One sign was once given, and it was *the sign of the prophet Jonas*³: Jesus was declared to be the Son of God once for all *with power by resurrection from the dead*⁴. Now the heaven has closed after Him: and it is only to such eyes as those of His first martyrs and Apostles⁵ that it has ever been permitted even for a moment to gaze after Him into that glory. *We walk by faith, not by sight*⁶: and often is faith severely tasked and patience wellnigh exhausted. Yet behind that veil He is; and if He comes not, it is chiefly because He is *long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come, and come as a thief in the night*⁷. *Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry*⁸. Even now He is walking among His candlesticks:

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 4.² Mark xiii. 21.³ Matt. xii. 39.⁴ Rom. i. 4.⁵ Acts vii. 55. 1 Cor. ix. 1.⁶ 2 Cor. v. 7.⁷ 2 Pet. iii. 9, 10.⁸ Hab. ii. 3.

and there are eyes even upon earth which see Him there. God grant that our eyes be not blind to Him! God grant that we may not only be looking out for His Epiphany, but also seeing Him now by faith! If it be so, we shall be also His witnesses. *By pureness, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left*¹, we shall be bearing every day a strong if silent testimony; drawing towards Him the eyes of others also, and persuading them to become followers of us, even as we are of Jesus. *We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal*².

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 6, 7.

² 2 Cor. iv. 18.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY,
January 13, 1861.

LECTURE II.

REVELATION II. 4.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

LET us first read the Epistle to the church of Ephesus as a whole. It occupies the first seven verses of the chapter.

To the angel of the congregation in Ephesus write. The speaker is our Lord Jesus Christ, revealed in vision to the beloved disciple some 60 years after His Ascension¹. Lapse of time has no place in heaven. *Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more²*: He is *the same yesterday and to-day and for ever³*.

The person spoken to is St John⁴; an exile, at the time, in the island of Patmos, for the word of God and

¹ The later of the assigned dates of St John's exile in Patmos has here been adopted, though with a full sense of the difficulty of the question.

² Rom. vi. 9.

³ Heb. xiii. 8.

⁴ Rev. i. 9—11.

for the testimony of Jesus Christ. He was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard his Master's voice saying to him, *What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia...To the angel of the congregation in Ephesus write*¹.

The angel of the church is its chief minister or pastor. The title is borrowed from the Jewish synagogue; in which the angel or messenger of the assembly was the person who presided over and managed the meetings for worship, charged as it were with the messages of the people to God, leading their devotions, inviting the exhortations of those who were qualified to address the congregation, and exercising also (it is said) something of discipline over its members. The angel then of the church in Ephesus is the presiding minister of the Christian body there.

You will notice that Christ recognizes such a person in His congregation. *God is not the author of confusion*² but of order in His churches. There is a meaning, there is a reality, in the commission given after due training and discipline to a particular man to undertake the office of guiding and of shepherding the flock of Christ in a particular place. Christ recognizes him as holding an office, and if He has anything to say to the congregation, He says it (so the text teaches us) through him. *Write*, He says to St John, not to the church, but *to the angel of the church, in Ephesus*.

There is sometimes a misplaced humility on the part of Christian ministers, as well as sometimes a mis-

¹ Verse 1.

² 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

placed assumption. It is not the language of truth, and therefore it is not the language of Christian humility, for a minister to pretend to have no charge, no commission, no office divinely constituted, amongst those whom yet he teaches, to whom yet he administers the Word and the Sacraments. If Christ did not set him to do these things, it would be a great impertinence, a great presumption, that he should undertake them. Therefore, while he ought to humble himself, he ought not to disparage his office¹: if his commission does not come from Christ, he is the most presumptuous of men to set himself up to teach.

There is a further thought to be suggested from these first words. In some respects the minister and his congregation are sure to be alike. There will be some such resemblance between his state and theirs (speaking generally) as shall justify both being described in the same terms. *I know thy works* may be said to him, and it may mean his people also. We must not press the remark too far. A good minister may sometimes be unsuccessful in impressing his people. And even under the worst of ministers God will not always leave Himself without witness. In the lanes and yards of a most neglected parish there shall still be found here and there a pious and a holy person, showing that, if the ministers of Christ *should hold their peace, the very stones*² will *cry out* concerning Him; if the people cannot live by the bread dispensed in public, they may yet derive life and

¹ Rom. xi. 13.

² Luke xix. 40.

nourishment from some other *word proceeding* in a more exceptional manner *out of the mouth of God*¹.

Such are some of the lessons to be drawn from the superscription of the letter. *Unto the angel of the congregation in Ephesus write.*

These things saith He who holdeth the seven stars in his right hand; He who keeps in His own control and under His own management the ministrations of His messengers: for the seven stars, you remember, are the angels of the seven churches. It is a very awful thought, and yet a very strengthening and encouraging thought also, for Christ's appointed ministers: He holds them in His own hand. O how seriously, how gravely, how religiously, ought they to deport themselves in the exercise of their ministry! If it is worth anything, it means not only that Christ's hand is in it, but that it is itself in Christ's hand; every movement, every step, every plan, every function, taken and formed and exercised in Him, under His guidance, under His control, in His strength alone.

And then for the congregation. *Who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. The seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches*². He, the great High Priest passed through the heavens³, has not transferred to His ministers the real charge and oversight of His people on earth: He has given them an office, a real and a responsible office; but He has not handed over His people absolutely to them, in such sense that they are to be the channels of His grace,

¹ Matt. iv. 4.

² Rev. i. 20.

³ Heb. iv. 14.

the communicators of His living and life-giving Spirit to *the church which is His body*¹. No, in this the highest sense of all, every individual Christian is in direct contact and communion with Christ Himself. It is not through the minister that he derives grace from Christ: upon each separate soul the Spirit is poured out, and it is because Christ lives that every single Christian lives also². Christ walks Himself among His candlesticks: and each separate lamp, of all the thousands which make up the branches of one candlestick, is as much trimmed and tended and fostered by Christ Himself as if there were no other but that one, and as if there were no human agency at all constituted for its oversight.

And now let us look at the first of seven descriptions of the possible state of a Christian congregation. What was the condition in Christ's sight of the church at Ephesus in the days of St John, of that church which has now utterly perished so that the very *place thereof knows it no more*³?

*I know*⁴ *thy works*: that may be said to each one: that is the general, the universal truth: whatever we are, as a body or as individuals, Christ knows it exactly: He knows our works, our conduct, our spirits, our life, past, present, and to come. *And thy toil, and thy patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try those who say of themselves that they are apostles*, that they have a message and a commission from Christ, *and they are not such, and didst find them*

¹ Eph. i. 22, 23.

² Acts ii. 17, 18. John xiv. 19.

³ Psalm ciii. 16.

⁴ Verse 2.

false; and¹ hast patience, and didst bear for my name's sake, and didst not weary. Thus then there is toil, and patience, and abhorrence of evil, and discernment, and again patience, and endurance, and unwearied exertion. What can be wanting here?

But² I have against thee that thou didst let go thy first love. Remember³ then whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works: and if not, I am coming for thee, coming as regards thee, coming in a manner which concerns thee—such is the force of the pronoun employed—and *will remove thy candlestick out of its place unless thou shalt have repented,* unless before my visitation takes place thou shalt have acquired that new mind which ever brings after it a new life. Laborious, enduring, diligent, uncompromising, yet thou hast left thy first love. And except that be recovered, Christ will move away thy candlestick, and thou shalt be a church no more. The loss of love, even without the accompanying loss of patience, of diligence, or of purity, demands repentance or prognosticates ruin.

But the reproofs of Christ are all tempered. Not like our own, which can only see in a person the good, or only the evil. Not like our own, which often confound in one sweeping judgment that which is beautiful with that which is defective, and count it a false and dangerous compromise to allow to one who is wanting in one grace the praise of possessing another. *Thou didst let go,* He says, *thy first love...But⁴ this*

¹ Verse 3.² Verse 4.³ Verse 5.⁴ Verse 6.

thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. We may suppose that the Nicolaitans were the Antinomians of the Asiatic Church; persons who taught that the conduct is immaterial if the faith be right; that *a man may say he hath faith*¹, and, if so, may be indifferent altogether to his works; or who at least, if they did not teach thus, yet encouraged the deceitful heart in drawing this inference, by failing to set strongly and even sharply before men the utter ruin of an inconsistent and unholy life, and then not least but most of all, when that sinful life is combined with the loud profession of a saving faith.

And are we left here? left with this ambiguous message of blame and of approval? No, the reproofs of Christ are always followed by exhortations, and the exhortations of Christ by His encouragements and by His promises. So it is here. *Let him*² *that hath an ear, let him whose heart is not so hardened that the inward ear has utterly lost its hearing, hear what the Spirit saith to the congregations: To him that conquereth I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God.* Once the tree of life was forbidden to man: *lest he should put forth his hand and eat of it and live for ever, he was sent forth from the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword was placed at the east of the garden, to keep from him the way of the tree of life*³. But now in Christ Jesus this consequence of the Fall is to be done away; and the last chapter of the Bible tells us how

¹ James ii. 14.² Verse 7.³ Gen. iii. 22—24.

in the midst of the street of the heavenly city there shall stand *the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, and yielding her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations*¹. Life, eternal life, is union with God²: to him that overcometh it shall be given to be for ever with God, dwelling in His presence, and sharing His immortality.

To him that conquereth. It is not said, that overcometh this enemy or that enemy, but in general, *to him that overcometh*. It is implied that we are here in the midst of a battle, from which we cannot escape, and of which the issue is doubtful. Would to God, my brethren, that we were all conscious of this! If once the notion of conflict, of warfare, of battle, were distinctly present to us, there would be a hope for the most backward. Few of us would deliberately choose the side of evil. None certainly would be willing to *dwell with everlasting burnings*³. But the art of the enemy is shown in this, that he contrives to make us unconscious of being in a battle at all. *We wrestle not against flesh and blood*⁴, and therefore flesh and blood may, if they will, be unaware of the wrestling. *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal*⁵, and therefore none can wield them who are not first in some sense spiritual. My brethren, we love to imagine that all is peace around us. We say to ourselves, *Peace, Peace*⁶. We try to hope that what the Scripture tells us, what sermons and religious books tell us, of a constant conflict, is all fancy,

¹ Rev. xxii. 2.

² John xvii. 3.

³ Isai. xxxiii. 14.

⁴ Ephes. vi. 12.

⁵ 2 Cor. x. 4.

⁶ Jer. vi. 14.

or at least all figure. We do not see any enemy; we do not feel any struggle: may we not just fold our arms, and take life as it comes, and yet, if only we avoid gross sins, be all right at last?

In answer to all such calculations, the words before us come in with their grave and solemn yet sober warning: *To him that overcometh*. My brethren, we may fancy many things, and we may deceive ourselves or be deceived in many things; but I greatly doubt whether any one ever yet deceived himself really upon this all-important question, whether he is a fighting man inwardly, or a resting; whether life, spiritual life I mean, is to him in any sense a struggle; whether he is truly *fighting under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil*¹, truly Christ's soldier as well as Christ's servant, in the life which he now lives in the body.

It is not a pleasant view of life: it is one which makes a great demand upon our energy and upon our self-denial: it is one which must materially alter the way in which we commonly deal with ourselves and the way in which we commonly deal with others. It is much pleasanter to pass on quietly and evenly, to float down the stream of habit and inclination, to see one another's good points and to rest tranquilly upon our own, to suppose that much of the Bible imagery is exuberant and oriental, and that everything in it must be read in the light of sober experience and of common sense. Yes, my friends, let it all be read so; but let us not

¹ Service for Baptism of Infants.

read it with shut eyes and blinded hearts. If there is no conflict in us, if life is easy, if we cannot understand why the world should be called or thought of as a battle-field, let us ask ourselves why this is so: is it because we are so good that sin is no temptation to us? or is it because others, who have found life a great struggle, and have always acted and spoken as if even *the righteous could scarcely be saved*¹, have been fantastic in their scruples or visionary in their aspirations? Search and look, and pray for God's help in the enquiry; and see whether before next Sunday you have not found in your path a very real enemy; some definite evil temper, evil habit, or evil lust; some positive tendency to sin, in heart, in tongue, or in life; at least, some indisposition to a known duty towards God or man; which the calmest reason, no less than the most explicit revelation, will pronounce to be a foe to salvation, and against which, if not yet against the whole body and army of sin, you must, as you love your soul, gird yourself for combat.

To him that overcometh. Now the text singles out for us one particular, in which we may be exposed to the danger of not overcoming. *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.* Or, *But I have against thee that thou didst let go thy first love.* The first love spoken of is the original love; that love with which a person has set out in his Christian course. I admit then that, in its full strength of expression, the warning here given is only applicable to

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 18.

those—and I fear they may not be all of us—who have once known something of real love for Christ. To others it can apply only indirectly. To others it must say, How serious it is never to have loved Christ! How alarming should be the thought of not having yet even set out! What chance can there be of reaching a goal for which you have not started? What hope of finding yourself in *the haven where you would be*¹, if you have never yet quitted the harbour of self-security at the opposite side of the great stormy ocean? If it is sad to have lost something of your first love for Christ, is it not yet more awful never to have had any?

Thus the words of Christ are ever a two-edged sword. There is a word written for the backslider; and yet even that word has an admonition too for the unconverted. But are we not in some sense, very many of us, within the scope of its first meaning, within the reach of its first application?

You observe that it is no answer to the charge here written, to say that you are still living in all Christian habits. You have noticed how very strongly this is expressed in the context. Labour for Christ, patience and submission, hatred of evil and zeal for good, these things were all still true of that church which had yet left its first love. As in other things, so in religion, the force of habit is strong. A person who has once begun to pray and to read God's Word and to attend the Holy Communion finds it almost easier to go on with these things than to give them up. To

¹ Psalm cvii. 30.

give them up is to attract notice ; notice from Christian friends, notice from worldly neighbours. To give them up is to awaken conscience ; to arouse everything that is in us of conviction and of godly fear into an open condemnation of our act and of our state. To go on with Christian habits, even when Christian love has grown faint, is to avoid observation and to lull conscience ; to satisfy a sense of duty, and to keep all things in train for the possibility of a return.

Dare we say, my brethren, in how many hearts here open before God the text sounds as a true indictment? It is not in the ranks of the openly indifferent, not amongst known sinners, amongst the immoral or the profane, that we must seek them : rather will they be found amidst our regular worshippers, amidst our at least occasional communicants, amongst those whom we cannot but respect, for whom (so far as we know them) we cannot but be hopeful. Do not some of these look back sadly and sorrowfully, and perhaps with bitter self-reproaches, upon a time in their lives more devoted than the present? a time when they were more alive to the love of Christ, and when, if their life was not more consistent, at least their heart was tenderer and more spiritual?

The inward experience of all Christians tells of variations. There are days, there are seasons, there are periods, of less or of more comfort, of less or of more devotion, of less or of more faith and hope and love. There is a health of the soul, as well as a health of the body, each of which is liable to fluctuation. This is and

has been and will be. Nowhere do we find such alternations, such vicissitudes of spiritual feeling more strongly or more fully expressed than in the Book of Psalms. No doubt these things tend to good. They promote humility. They induce watchfulness. They teach a man how entirely he depends upon the grace of God for his happiness as well as for his strength. And after every season of depression, of coldness, of deadness of spirit, a man flies back as it were with double eagerness to the spring of contentment and of satisfaction which is still by the longsuffering of God open for his return.

But the text speaks of something more than this. It speaks of a decay, not of a variation. It speaks of a man leaving or losing his first love, and acquiescing in that loss. It speaks of a man settling down into a lower state of spiritual life than that which he once aimed at and once knew. It speaks of backsliding; that expressive word which indicates not a sudden fall, not an occasional inconsistency, not a temporary loss of tone and vigour in the spiritual life, but a gradual slipping backwards; gentle, unmarked, unnoticed in its course, but apparent in the result, when a man who has let himself drift at last finds himself gone, perceives that he is not where he was nor what he was, though he cannot retrace the method or the steps of his retrogression.

It may be that he has rested too securely in grace once given, and trusted in the permanence of feelings once aroused. It may be that he has suffered the world to come in upon him, and to rub away something of the gloss and bloom, the beauty and the freshness, of his

first devotion. It may be that he has allowed himself to mingle in the strife of religious party, and to substitute a zeal for truth in the place of a humble life of secret communion with God. Or it may be that a mere familiarity with the words and with the habits of the Gospel has been permitted to make the things signified and the inward realities of the kingdom less strong and less forcible to him. And yet, all the while, it is possible that the habits of a Christian may be all retained, and nothing altered in him except that innermost spirit of all, which is known only to a man himself and to *the God of the spirits of all flesh*¹.

Three things are very evident from the terms in which this state is here described.

1. First, that it is a state of danger. It is a fall from grace. *Remember from whence thou art fallen.* It is a condition requiring repentance; special repentance for it as for a special sin. *Repent. If therefore thou shalt not repent.* It is a state provoking judgment. God is displeased by it. When His Spirit has been given, it might at least be cherished. It is not much to ask of a man, that he depart not from grace once vouchsafed. That undoing of the divine work done, that carelessness which treats as a thing of little value the possession of the love of Christ, that want of appreciation of things that differ which will even acquiesce in the return of a deadness once quickened, must indeed bear a condemning aspect in heaven, where the light of God's countenance is the one thing valued, where *the Lord God Al-*

¹ Num. xvi. 22.

*mighty and the Lamb*¹ are the very sun and life of all. *I will come upon thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.*

2. Secondly, even from this state there is, on earth, a possibility of return. *Remember from whence thou art fallen.* Let memory rehearse to you the joys which belonged to a forfeited condition. Think what it was to have Christ near to you. Think what it was to *love Him* as having *first loved you*². Think what it was to see His death for sin as an act of personal love to you, and to be able to say, *The very life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*³. Think what it was to have the light of His countenance streaming upon you unchecked, and to be conscious of that practical influence upon your life which an Apostle has described as *the love of Christ constraining him*⁴. Think of these things, ere yet memory itself has become a lifeless remorse, and pray God so to assist you with His grace that you may not only *hold fast the things which remain* but recover the things which are passed; and humbling yourself deeply before Him as a self-accusing backslider, may hear also in your inmost heart those gracious words of forgiveness, *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him*⁵.

3. Finally, for these, and for all, what a view is here opened of the precariousness of the Christian life;

¹ Rev. xxi. 22, 23.

² 1 John iv. 19.

³ Gal. ii. 20.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 14.

⁵ Hosea xiv. 4.

of the tenderness and delicacy of the plant of divine grace in the heart of man! It will bear no rough handling; still more, it will bear no trifling and no neglecting: it is not indigenous; it is not a native of that soil; it is of the nature of an exotic; it has been transplanted into earth from heaven, and the light and the warmth, the dew and the rain of heaven are essential to its very life in its new resting-place. Therefore, *what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch¹. Be not highminded, but fear². Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall³*. We are only safe while we are walking closely with God, setting Him always before us, dwelling in the light of His countenance and under the shadow of His wing. Love may be lost without losing obedience; and when love goes, life goes. We all know in earthly relations how poor a thing mere duty is, where there is no love; how cold and calculating, how comfortless, how barren. Well may it be said, Love and you will obey: love God, love Christ, and then do what you will, you will not go far astray.

O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding; pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our Lord⁴.

¹ Mark xiii. 37.

² Rom. xi. 20.

³ 1 Cor. x. 12.

⁴ Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY,

January 20, 1861.

LECTURE III.

REVELATION II. 10.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

IN the beautiful passage which comes before us in due course this evening there is little need for explanation. I will read it to you with a word or two of comment.

And¹ to the angel, or chief pastor, of the congregation, or Christian body, in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last; He who was in the beginning, and shall be still in the end; He who hath neither beginning of days nor end of life²; He who is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever³, sharing in the immortality and in the eternity of God. Which was dead, and is alive: more exactly, He who became dead, and lived; He who once passed into the state

¹ Verse 8.

² Heb. vii. 3.

³ Heb. xiii. 8.

of death, into the condition of a dead man, and then lived, was raised from death, to die no more for ever. You remember in the Apostles' Creed how carefully this point is noted. *Was crucified, dead, and buried*: not only *died*, but *was dead*; not only suffered all the pains of dying, but also continued for a time in the grasp of death, and in that condition underwent all that men have to undergo, the lying in the grave, and the sojourning in Hades the place of departed spirits. There are some who dread the state of death, the condition of being dead, even more than they dread the act of dying. For these it is written that Christ not only died but was dead: whatever they have to encounter of strangeness or of separation, He has known, He has borne, in Himself; and they may trust themselves with Him. He not only feels for them, but He can feel with them, in all. *He became dead, and again He lived*. So shall it be with them.

I know¹ thy tribulation and thy poverty—but thou art rich. We are reminded here of the contrast elsewhere drawn in Scripture between worldly and true riches. *So is he*, our Lord says, *who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God²*. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven³*. And so St James says, *Hearken, my beloved brethren: Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love him⁴?* So was it with the

¹ Verse 9.

² Luke xii. 21.

³ Matt. vi. 19.

⁴ James ii. 5.

Church here addressed. *I know thy poverty—but thou art rich.* The wealth of this world is denied thee; but thou hast a better and a truer treasure, of which this world knows nothing. *And I know thy reviling, or blasphemy, on the part of those who say that they themselves are Jews,* who arrogate to themselves the position of God's chosen Israel, *and they are not* such really, *but* are a very *synagogue of Satan.* Probably the faithful Christians in Smyrna were suffering from the calumny and persecution of the Jewish body, in some form or other; that is, either of a Judaizing party within the professed Church, or of unconverted and avowed Jews without. Of these, whichever they were, it is here declared in the strongest terms that, so far from having any real claim to the exalted position which they assumed as descendants of Abraham, they were a very synagogue of Satan; proved by their works to be followers of him who was *a liar* and *a murderer from the beginning*¹, and to have neither part nor Lot in God's truth or in God's acceptance.

*Fear*² *not at all the things which thou art about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.* I do not tell you that you shall not suffer, and suffer sharply. *Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat*³: you are to be subjected to a trying, that is, a testing, an exploring, and a sifting process; it must be shown which of you are true men, and which false; it must be shown, to yourselves and to those who look on, what there is in you of real

¹ John viii. 44.² Verse 10.³ Luke xxii. 31.

living constant faith, and what there is in you of empty hollow cowardly profession. I cannot excuse you from this necessity. It would not be for your good, and it would not be for the good of God's cause on earth, that your false parts should be covered up and disguised to the end, or that your life on earth should be one of smooth easy tranquil routine, making no demand upon your principles, upon your courage, or upon your divine strength. You are to be cast even into prison, that you may be tried. *And ye shall have a tribulation of ten days*: a storm, sharp but short, is about to burst upon thee: in the retrospect, if not in the endurance, thou wilt describe it as but a ten days' suffering: *become*, show thyself, *faithful unto death*, and *I will give thee* (not a but) *the crown of life*. Prove thyself faithful, trustworthy, one who can be relied upon, just up to death; through whatever may lie between thee and that last decisive sealing moment: there thy trial ends, whatever it may have been till then: just up to death; there thy responsibility is bounded: till then thou art in charge of thyself; after that I am in charge of thee; after that, thou hast no longer any risk, or any room for anxiety: show thyself faithful unto death, and then, at that moment, just as thou emergest from that dark stream, or more exactly according to the figure here employed, just as thou reachest that goal, just as thy strained and wearied and panting form arrives at that winning-post, I the judge of the race, I the arbiter of the contest, will stretch out my hand to thee, and in my hand shall be the prize of the combat, even that crown, that gar-

land, that imperishable, that incorruptible wreath¹, of which we heard in the Epistle for last Sunday, which, being interpreted, is *life*, eternal life, rest in God, the fruition of God, union with God, through His beloved Son, by the eternal Spirit, even for ever and ever.

Let² him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit saith to the congregations: he that conquereth shall not be injured on the part of (by) the second death. The second death shall have no power over him to whom, as having overcome in the conflict, as having been victorious in the race, Christ has given the wreath of life. *The second death*, a very awful expression, is a term used more than once in the 20th and 21st chapters of this Book. Thus, for example, *Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.* Again, *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire: this, the lake of fire, is the second death³.* And once more, *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death⁴.* We must all die once; so we heard in the first Lesson for this morning⁵; all, that is, except, as St Paul teaches us in the chapter just read to you⁶, the one generation which shall be alive upon earth at Christ's second Advent; we must all, with this exception, die once; but we need not die

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 25.

² Verse 11.

³ Rev. xx. 6, 14.

⁴ Rev. xxi. 8.

⁵ Gen. iii. 19.

⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 51.

twice over: the second death is that dying over again after death, which is the terrible doom of the sinner; that *destruction of both soul and body in hell*¹ of which our Lord warns us to be afraid; that reunion of a revived body with a lost soul², which is to be the misery of the wicked in the world beyond the grave. From this second death Jesus Christ came upon earth and died to redeem us: O let not us whom He came to save choose death and refuse life! *He that overcometh shall not be injured by the second death. On such the second death hath no power.*

Thus was St John instructed to write from Patmos to the Church at Smyrna. It was a message serious indeed, in one sense alarming, alarming to flesh and blood, alarming with reference to the destinies of the life that is, but a message of unmixed approval and hope with reference to the life unseen and eternal. I know thy tribulation; I know thy poverty, as the world counts poverty; I know how thou art reviled by those who call themselves the people of God; I know too how thou art about to suffer; a process of trial, of discrimination, of searching and sifting, is soon to begin for thee: but till now thou hast been faithful; be faithful to the end, and the crown of life is thine.

It is interesting to be able to give any personal application to one of these messages to the churches. In the case of Smyrna, alone perhaps of all, we can do this. We know the name of an early angel of the church

¹ Matt. x. 28.

² John v. 29.

of Smyrna; his name, his character, and his end. He may have been the very person to whom St John here writes. Certainly St John had seen him, and spoken with him. We still possess both a letter of his writing, a description of his character, and a detailed record of his martyrdom. And this last so beautifully illustrates the prophecy, the charge, and the promise, on which we have been dwelling, that I think it will be instructive as well as interesting to remind you of some few of its particulars, showing how that venerable servant of Christ was enabled by His grace not to fear any of the things which he had to suffer, how he endured a tribulation of ten days, was faithful unto death, and then received from his Saviour the promised crown of life.

We read that in the year of our Lord 167 a cruel persecution broke out against the Christians of Asia Minor. Polycarp, the aged bishop of the church of Smyrna, would fain have awaited at his post the fate which threatened him. But the entreaties of his people, and the duty of not courting danger needlessly, induced him to withdraw to a neighbouring refuge, where he busied himself day and night, as he was wont, in prayers and intercessions; intercessions, it is specially mentioned, for all communities of Christ's people scattered throughout the world. From thence he retired to another hiding-place, still desiring that the hand of God, not his own hand, should be visible in summoning him to the martyr's crown. At last his place of retreat was discovered; discovered, we read, by the evidence of a child, who had been forced by torture to make known

where he was. Satisfied now that his hour was come, he refused further flight, saying, *The will of God be done.* He came down from the upper story of the house to meet his captors, ordered them as much refreshment as they might desire, and only asked of them this favour, that they would grant him yet one hour of undisturbed prayer. The fulness of his heart carried him on for two hours, and even the heathen, we are told, were touched by the sight of the old man's devotion. He was then conveyed back to the city, to Smyrna.

The officer into whose hands he was delivered was one of those men who, like Pilate in a yet more awful crisis, would rather be humane than cruel, if only some compromise can be discovered by which they may reconcile self-interest with clemency. But this cannot always be done. Sometimes the fidelity of the prisoner himself prevents it. *What harm,* the officer asks him, *can it be for you to offer sacrifice to the Emperor?* Such was the test commonly proposed to an accused Christian; that he should submit to pay divine honours to the Roman Emperor. This might not be. The servant of the Lord must not for any consideration be guilty of idolatry. When it was found that there was no sign of yielding, pity was exchanged for anger, and he was roughly flung from the carriage in which he was being conveyed into the city. When he appeared in the amphitheatre before the tribunal of his judge, the Roman magistrate said to him, *Swear, curse Christ, and I will set thee free.* But the old man answered in words familiar to many of you, *Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He has never done*

me wrong: how then can I curse Him, my King and my Saviour? When they continued to press him, he said, *Well then if you desire to know what I am, I tell you freely, I am a Christian! If you desire to know what Christianity is, appoint an hour, and hear me.* In vain the magistrate threatened him with being thrown to the wild beasts or burned alive: and at last the fatal proclamation was publicly made, that *Polycarp confessed himself a Christian.* This was the death-warrant. The people shouted aloud, *This is the teacher of Atheism, the father of the Christians, the enemy of our Gods, who has taught so many not to pray to the Gods, and not to sacrifice!* He was condemned to be burnt alive. Jews and Gentiles, the whole *synagogue of Satan* described in the passage before us, alike hastened in rage and fury to collect wood from the baths and the workshops for the funeral pile. The old man laid aside his garments, and took his place in the midst of the fuel. When they would have nailed him to the stake, he said to them, *Leave me thus, I pray, unfastened: He who has enabled me to brave the fire, will give me strength also to endure its fierceness.* He then uttered this brief prayer: *O Lord, Almighty God, the Father of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received a knowledge of Thee; God of the angels and of the whole creation, of the whole race of man, and of the saints who live before Thy presence; I thank Thee that Thou hast thought me worthy, this day and this hour, to share the cup of Thy Christ among the number of Thy witnesses!* The fire was kindled; but a high wind drove the flame to one side, and prolonged

his sufferings: at last the executioner despatched him with a sword.

Thus did an angel of the church in Smyrna *endure grief suffering wrongfully*¹. Thus did he show himself *faithful unto death*, and receive through martyrdom *the crown of life*. Christ does not quench the fire that would consume His servants; but He makes it purifying; and through it lies for them the path of life.

And now, my brethren, for ourselves. The days of martyrdom are suspended at least, if not for ever ended. Yet still, if not called to be Christ's martyrs, we are all called to be what that name literally rendered denotes, Christ's witnesses. To each one of us, as much as ever in the first days of the Church to martyrs or confessors, to Polycarp or to Peter, the charge of Christ is this, *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life*.

Faithful. Trustworthy. One whom Christ can trust. One whom Christ can rely upon. One whom his Master can entrust with His goods. One who can be depended upon not to use upon himself that which was deposited with him for the good of others. One who is quite sure not to squander and not to hoard talents committed to him. Again, one who can be relied upon not to say one thing to his Master's face and another thing behind his Master's back; not to say to Him, with every show of earnestness, *I go*, Lord, at Thy bidding, and then not to go²; not to profess devotion, zeal, and diligence, and yet

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 19.

² Matt. xxi. 30.

in act and deed to be lukewarm, idle, and neglectful. These are some of the things involved in that grave word *faithful*. My brethren, I mention them with seriousness, and I mention them also with trembling. I know that these are amongst the characteristics of Christ's true servants: but if so, I fear we have much cause for doubting our own right to that glorious name. We all know what we count faithfulness, and what we stigmatize as unfaithfulness, in a servant; how rigid we are in the exaction of a perfect uprightness; how we treat as dishonesty the smallest appropriation of that property of ours which is in his hands; how we expect the entire devotion of time and strength, of mind and body, to the service once undertaken, to the interests once confided. Which of us can bear the application of such a test in reference to the service of a heavenly Master? Well might St Paul speak of faithfulness as one of Christ's gifts—is it not, of all, the greatest?—and say of himself that he had *obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful*¹.

O my brethren, it is of no use coming hither with large professions, calling Christ *Lord, Lord*², while we kneel here in His worship, confessing ourselves to be unprofitable servants, miserable offenders, once or twice a week, and yet making no endeavour in the week which follows to correct these faults, or to rise to that devotion which we seem to think due from us. If we are not in danger from the fires of martyrdom, we are in great, in hourly danger from a fire more trying and

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 25.

² Luke vi. 46.

more searching still ; the temptation of an easy, a worldly, a self-satisfied spirit ; the flattery of a self-complacent, a complaisant and a time-serving world ! Well might Christ go round this congregation, and say to each of us, and repeat it over and over again as a charge not easy of obedience, *Be thou faithful...And thou, be thou faithful !* I have put into thy hands one of my talents, or two of my talents, or five of my talents¹, as the case may be : I have given thee a certain number of years to spend on earth ; I have given thee a certain amount of wealth, or of influence, or of power ; I have given thee a Bible, I have given thee a church ; I have given thee reason, I have given thee a conscience, I have given thee a soul : *occupy till I come*² ; be faithful ; let me trust thee ; use the gift well ; do not forget who gave it ; do not forget whose it is even while it is in thy hands ; do not forget who will call for an account of it ; be faithful ! O be faithful ! Be not ashamed of me before men³ ; let conscience speak ; make out what is right, and also do it ; do it like a man ; do it, and fear not ; do it, and bid others do it, and encourage them in doing it ! Say, like Polycarp, *Christ never did me any wrong ; how can I revile Him ?* how can I forget, how can I disobey, how can I turn aside from Him ?

Be thou faithful unto death. Perhaps death seems a long way off. Perhaps you say in your heart, How can I hold out so long ? It may come sooner than you think. Do not let it surprise you ! But if it tarry,

¹ Matt. xxv. 15.

² Luke xix. 13.

³ Mark viii. 38.

if it wait till the *threescore years and ten* or even the *fourscore years*¹, yet wait for it: it will surely come: and when it comes, you will be glad that you did wait for it. It is a very great thing to know that there is a fixed limit, fixed in God's counsels, fixed in Christ's foreknowledge, after which all responsibility will be taken off from us, all strain relaxed, all effort ended, every sinew and every nerve resting! Just until death struggle on; take each day by itself; try to do the will of God, try to be faithful to Christ, just through that one day; and in many senses every evening will be a death, and every morning a resurrection; you may say to yourself in the morning, Let me be faithful just until the evening, and at evening you may trust yourself with Christ just until the morning; and thus, accepting God's merciful ordinance of day and night as it was intended, you will be helped through your pilgrimage; at last that night will come when faithfulness has been consummated; then you will have been faithful unto death: and what then?

I will give thee the crown of life. Is not that, little as we may yet conceive of it, worthy of some endeavour, of some striving, of some watchfulness; of some self-denial? O do I address to-night any despisers of everlasting life²? any who are *thinking scorn of that pleasant land*³? Alas! there are such: at times, I fear, we are all, more or less, among them. There are times when we cannot rouse within us any just appreciation of the

¹ Psal. xc. 10.² Acts xiii. 46.³ Psalm cvi. 24.

prize for which we are running, of the heaven for which we are fighting. This is a sad thing; a sad dishonour to God, a sad ingratitude, a sad unbelief. Even Christians are not free from it: how is it with those who are not Christians? How is it with the careless, with the sinful, with the hard-hearted? *Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near*¹!

God grant that the words now spoken may not have been spoken in vain! May He, who alone can, speak His own call to the inward ear; and raise some, even this night, even among those who are here assembled, *from the death of sin to the life of righteousness*²!

¹ Isai. lv. 6.

² Burial Service.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY,
February 3, 1861.

LECTURE IV.

REVELATION II. 17.

And in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

THESE are the last words of the message to the church of Pergamos. That message is of a mixed character. Praise and blame are mingled in it. In the same degree perhaps it is a message more exactly suited to the state of a modern congregation than one of entire approval, such as we considered last Sunday evening in the Epistle to the church of Smyrna.

Each of these addresses begins with the mention of some characteristic of Him from whom it comes. In the case of Pergamos, the selection of that characteristic prepares us for the tone of the Epistle itself. *To ¹the angel of the congregation in Pergamos write: These things saith He that hath the two-edged, the sharp sword.* We read of this sword in the first

¹ Verse 12.

chapter. We read of it also in the Epistle to the Hebrews. *The word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart*¹. *This sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*², proceeds out of the mouth of Christ.

But although we are thus prepared for a message of discrimination and reproof, the first words are of a different character. *I know*³ *where thou dwellest, even where the throne of Satan is.* A very fearful description, and indicating a very merciful recognition on the part of Christ of the difficulties and of the temptations of His people. In this case He was able to testify that difficulties and temptations, of an outward kind at least, had not overcome their constancy.

And thou holdest my name. The name of a person is in Scripture language the summary of what he is. The name is the brief description; that which brings the whole person before us. The name of God is the revealed character of God; the sum of His attributes⁴; God such as He is. In like manner the name of Christ is the revelation of Christ; the sum of His characteristics; Christ such as He is. The congregation of Christians here addressed had held fast what they had been taught of Christ.

And didst not deny my faith in the days in which Antipas my faithful witness was slain beside, or among,

¹ Heb. iv. 12.

² Eph. vi. 17.

³ Verse 13.

⁴ Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6, 7.

you, where Satan dwelleth. Even the sight of a martyrdom, a witness unto death, had not deterred them from holding fast their profession. To deny Christ is to say, like Peter in his night of trial, *I know Him not*¹; I have nothing to do with Him; I owe Him no allegiance; He is not my Master; I am not His servant. This the Christians of Pergamos had not done. They had been stedfast under this severe trial.

But what the fires of martyrdom could not do, a more secret and insidious snare might effect. They who could brave martyrdom for Christ cannot always resist an enemy in their own camp: some bosom sin may do what intimidation and persecution have failed to effect. Listen then. *But*² *I have against thee a few things.* How serious a beginning! Which of us can hear unmoved when Christ says, *I have against thee a few things?*

Thou hast there, in Pergamos, men holding—it is the same word used above, *Thou holdest my name—the teaching of Balaam, who taught to Balak how to throw a stumblingblock before the sons of Israel, namely, both to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.* That *strange mixture of a man*, as Balaam has been called but too truly, a man *who heard the words of God and saw the vision of the Almighty*³, yet whose heart went after covetousness⁴, and made a fatal compromise between the service of God and the service of Mammon; when he found that he was not allowed to curse

¹ Luke xxii. 57.

² Verse 14.

³ Numb. xxiv. 4, 16.

⁴ 2 Pet. ii. 15. Jude 11.

Israel, and thus to possess himself of the promised reward in one way, suggested to Balak a more subtle but far more potent spell, in the form of a temptation to Israel through the lusts of the flesh. The iniquities described in the 25th chapter of the Book of Numbers, following immediately upon the unsuccessful visit of Balaam in which cursing itself had been supernaturally turned into blessing, are expressly ascribed in a later chapter of that Book to the secret agency of Balaam. *Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord*¹. This old snare was laid again at Pergamos by some who should have known better. *So² hast thou too men holding the teaching of Nicolaitans in like manner.*

There is no occasion for distinguishing here between the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the doctrine of Balaam. The supposed necessity for doing so has arisen from a misunderstanding of the proper place of the word *also* in our Version of the 15th verse. It is not *also them that hold*, but *so hast thou also*, thou at Pergamos, as well as Israel of old, *them that hold*. The Nicolaitans were, as we saw on a former occasion, a body of Antinomians; persons who talked loudly of the liberty of Christ, and used that liberty *for an occasion to the flesh*³. They were amongst those described in the Epistle of St Jude as *ungodly men, turning the*

¹ Numb. xxxi. 16.

² Verse 15.

³ Gal. v. 13.

*grace of our God into lasciviousness*¹; persons who either openly taught, or by their general language encouraged the notion, that we may *continue in sin* on purpose *that grace may abound*². O, my brethren, how can I pass on without one word of grave and anxious caution on this all-important subject? I know that none of us hold the language of the Antinomian: but is there not, in days of general Gospel light, a tendency in that direction in practice? Is there not a vague unavowed unrealized idea that the Atonement has made sin less fatal, that even sin indulged and persisted in may yet not work death? And can any affront to Christ be so great as the notion that it is safe to live under His Gospel in a lower state of watchfulness and purity than we durst have acquiesced in under the Law? *If while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, if in my after conduct I return to those sins which I professed when I became a Christian utterly to abolish, I make myself a transgressor*³, and am *fallen from grace*⁴.

*Repent*⁵ then; such is the natural inference; and if not, *I am coming for thee*, coming as regards thee, coming for thy discomfiture and punishment, *quickly, and will war with them in*, that is, in the power and exercise of, *the sword of my mouth*. Though the whole congregation has not fallen into the snare, yet the whole congregation, the

¹ Jude 4.² Rom. vi. 1.³ Gal. ii. 17, 18.⁴ Gal. v. 4.⁵ Verse 16.

congregation represented by and personified in its angel, must repent. There is such a thing as an aggregate and corporate guilt; a guilt in which the body partakes, even though members of the body may be individually free. There is such a thing—the Epistles to the Corinthians exemplify it¹—as a church repenting for its members; a humiliation of all for the sins of some. I wish we thought more of this duty. It ought to affect us, and it ought to humble us, to look abroad upon the sins and upon the punishments of our fellow-Christians. We ought to feel for them, to pray for them, yes, and (as it is here written) to repent for them. If they are hard and sinful, let our hearts be tender; let us intercede, let us sorrow, let us be contrite, for them. It may be that our repentance may avert the threatened judgment. *If not, if thou shalt not repent, I am coming upon thee quickly, and will war with them with the sword of my mouth; even as it is written, He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked*².

Let³ him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit saith to the congregations: To him that conquereth I will give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name graven, which no one knoweth but he who receiveth it.

Such is the peculiar promise made in the case of this Church, *to him that conquereth. I will give him of the hidden manna.* There may be an allusion here to

¹ 1 Cor. v. 2. 2 Cor. vii. 11.

² Isai. xi. 4.

³ Verse 17.

that *omer full of manna* which Aaron was charged to lay up in a golden vessel within the ark of the covenant¹, as a memorial for ever of the care of God in the desert. The conqueror in the Christian warfare shall be allowed to eat of that hidden food; to eat, that is, of the true bread of which the manna was an earthly emblem, even of Him who said, *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever*².

Again, *I will give him a white stone*; I suppose, a new, clean, bright stone, unused before; with something cut upon it; a name, a new name, intelligible only to the owner, a secret between him and the giver, a name of honour and of happiness, a promotion and a glory to the bearer, in which none can intermeddle, and of which nothing can deprive him. I would understand the promise thus simply, and not lose myself in a multitude of conflicting ideas which the words taken singly might possibly introduce. We shall regard the peculiar promise by which Christ this night would encourage us to zeal and boldness in our life's warfare, as the promise of a personal, an incommunicable, and an inalienable possession, to be a secret between us and Him; a secret of deep love, a secret of undying life.

We ask not what the name is: the text tells us that no man knows it but the owner. *Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name*³. Wait till He names it. In the mean time, *he that be-*

¹ Exod. xvi. 33.

² John vi. 51.

³ Isai. lxii. 2.

lieth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself¹. The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God². Now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is³. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him: and He will show them His covenant⁴. The manna of their supply is a hidden manna: the stone of their credentials is a white stone, clear and clean, and the name graven upon it no man knoweth but he who receiveth it.

And thus the thought to be left with you this evening is that of the secret confided to a Christian; of the deep, the mysterious treasure which is put into his heart; the dignity and the security and the happiness of being in private personal constant communication with Christ Himself; of having something to do with Him by Himself, apart from every other person in the world; of being able to take Him into his heart by faith, and feed upon Him⁵, and live by Him; of standing in a certain relation towards Him, as individually cared for, individually loved⁶, individually redeemed, individually saved; of having Christ all for his own, not in a selfish sense, but yet in a personal sense; and of actually existing by faith in Him, and living because He lives⁷.

Perhaps there are some persons who can rest satisfied with a more superficial or a more gregarious kind of reli-

¹ 1 John v. 10.

⁴ Psalm xxv. 14.

² Rom. viii. 16.

⁵ John vi. 57.

⁷ John xiv. 19.

³ 1 John iii. 2.

⁶ Gal. ii. 20.

gion; persons who are well contented to be only one of a crowd of worshippers, inhabitants of a redeemed world, or members of a baptized Church. And these are all grounds of hope: starting-points, true and real, for a Christian life. But I am sure there are those amongst us who yearn after something deeper and more personal. There are those whose cry is, *Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us*¹; those who can rest in nothing outside the veil, not in the table of shew-bread, not in the altar of incense, not in the golden candlesticks, but feel that they must penetrate within that partition by the help of *the blood of sprinkling*², actually reach the mercy-seat where God's own light shines, and eat of that hidden manna which is treasured within the ark of life. They may be contented to struggle on, for their few years of life below, in a light less than perfect, and with a hope less than confident, if they may but be assured that there is a day of emancipation and of illumination before them, that there is a secret which shall one day be confided to them, an access to Christ, direct and personal, which shall be opened to them hereafter and never closed.

Such is the promise. And now I will end this discourse with two or three brief reflections springing naturally out of the subject.

1. And first a word of caution to those who are inclined to disparage and to despise religion. It is plain you do not know what true religion is. You must

¹ John xiv. 8.

² Heb. x. 19. xii. 24.

have formed a wrong idea of it. You could not look down upon it if you knew its real dignity. A Christian has *meat to eat that ye know not of*¹. A Christian is one who is in secret communication with God ; yes, whose *very life is hid with Christ in God*². A Christian is one to whom God tells His secrets. You would think it a great thing to be in the confidence of some earthly potentate : you would feel yourself raised in the scale of honour by being known or suspected to be behind the scenes as to the purposes and plans of some powerful sovereign whose movements half the world is watching with a mixture of wonder and apprehension : you would feel that to be the depository of his secrets was to be a man of consequence, a man of mark amongst your fellows. What must it be then to be in the confidence of God ? to have it said of you, *The secret of the Lord is with him ?* Christ gives him to eat of the hidden manna, and promises him a name which no man knoweth save the Giver of it and the receiver. It will not do to despise the Christian life. Those of us who know it not for themselves ought at least to look upon it with respect and awe. It is not beneath, it is *far above* them ; yes, *out of their sight*³.

2. Again, for Christians themselves the text has more than one word of exhortation. It bids them not cleave to the dust, but rather arise and claim their privilege. Ambition in earthly things is a snare and a disappointment⁴ : but in heavenly things St Paul

¹ John iv. 32.

² Col. iii. 3.

³ Psalm x. 5.

⁴ Phil. iii. 14.

himself taught us, by example and precept, to be ambitious¹. We ought to feel that there is nothing save unbelief alone between us and the very vision of God. Ye are not straitened in God, ye are straitened in your own hearts². We pray too often as if we were really afraid of being heard, as if we should be frightened at the answer. We rise from our knees as if to run away, like Jonah, from the presence which ought to be so dear to us³. Just as the heaven is opening, just as the comfort and strength for which in words we were asking is on the very point of descending⁴, we end and are gone, and the gift lights upon a desert. This ought not so to be. We ought to form a very high estimate of what is meant by eating of the hidden manna, of living upon the true bread of God, of having God's secret with us, of being shown by Him His covenant. And so estimating it, we ought also to be ambitious of its attainment; we ought to *follow on* earnestly, as the Prophet says, *to know the Lord*⁵, and count no pains and no patience too great if we may but at last enter into it.

3. Finally, remember and forget not to whom, and to whom only, the promise of the text is given. It is *to him that conquereth*. Yes, let us write that word on our hearts. It is not indeed, God be praised, that we are to overcome first and then God will give us as a reward the hidden manna: God knows our weakness too well, and is far too merciful towards us, to leave us to fight the battle alone, and then appear only to crown

¹ Rom. xv. 20. ² Cor. v. 9. ³ 1 Thess. iv. 11.

⁴ 2 Cor. vi. 12.

⁵ Jonah 1. 3.

⁶ Psalm lxxxi. 13, 14.

⁷ Hos. vi. 3.

the victor : God nerves the right arm which is to wield the sword¹, and the only sword which can prevail is the sword of His Spirit². But still I would remind you that it is to him who is really fighting, *fighting manfully under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil*³, and fighting not in vain but with a measure of true success, that the promise is here made of the hidden manna and of the mysterious name. It is not by dreamy reveries, it is not by soaring fancies, it is not by idle wishes or self-deceiving resolutions, that a Christian makes progress towards the apprehension of the mystery of God. It is by conquering. It is by making his life a real thing, with definite duties and clear aims. It is by praying every day, and many times in each day, for grace to repent of all sin and to do the whole will of God whatsoever it be for him⁴. It is by maintaining a serious and a watchful spirit, conscious of the great issues of life, and awake to the reality of things unseen. It is by turning every fall into a step onwards and upwards ; by arising again instantly, through humiliation and prayer, and renewing the conflict ; *by forgetting things behind, and reaching forth unto things before*, and pressing ever forward towards *the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus*⁵. It is thus ; but not thus only. While the life is carefully watched and rectified and purified, there is also a constant under life and inner life of the soul, maintained by that secret intercourse with God which must begin here if it is ever to be fulfilled and satisfied above.

¹ Psalm xlv. 3.² Eph. vi. 17.³ Baptismal Service.⁴ Col. iv. 12. 1 Thess. v. 18.⁵ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

The inner life and the outer life act and react upon each other. The inner life demands consistency in the outer ; without that congruity it could not exist : but equally does the outer life require vitality in the inner, and without that vitality within, it would itself be deranged, stand still, and die. *To him that conquereth will I give of the hidden manna :* and only by eating of the hidden manna can any man conquer. The paradox is in the words, not in the thing signified : we live for God by living in God ; and again the life in Him is fostered by the life for Him. God grant us all both these things ; first to *live in the Spirit*, and then to *walk in the Spirit*¹.

¹ Gal. v. 25.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY,
February 10, 1861.

LECTURE V.

REVELATION II. 29.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

BETWEEN Pergamos, the place of which we spoke last Sunday, and Sardis, the place to which the fifth of these letters is addressed, lay the city of Thyatira. We are familiar with the name in connection with the history of St Paul. At Philippi, the first convert was a person of Thyatira. *A certain woman, named Lydia, a seller of purple*, engaged in that dyeing trade for which the place and neighbourhood of Thyatira was famous, *who worshipped God*, who was already a proselyte to the faith and worship of Israel, *heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized and her household*¹, &c. This may have been—we know not—the beginning of that church in Thyatira to which the message now before us was many years later addressed.

¹ Acts xvi. 14, 15.

And¹ to the angel of the congregation in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes, whose eyes are, as a flame of fire, for brightness and for discernment; and His feet are like fine brass, for unwearied endurance and resistless strength. We are thus prepared for a message, in whole or in part, of reproof and judgment. But the first words are all of approval. I know² thy works, and thy love, and faith, and service, or ministration, and patience, and thy last works as being more than the first. There is not only a holding fast, but a going forward. There is progress, and there is improvement. Much is attained, and whatever there is is in advance of what there was. The last works are more than the first.

*But³ I have against thee that thou lettest alone, leavest free, sufferest to go unrestrained, the woman Jezebel. I am bound to say that there is much authority for reading thy wife Jezebel; as if the person spoken of was the wife of the angel or pastor of the Church himself. It is perhaps easier to explain why the pronoun *thy* should have been wrongly omitted than why it should have been arbitrarily inserted. A minister of Christ may have the misfortune to have a bad wife. Or he may have been culpably careless or culpably self-willed in choosing his wife. In either case he is much to blame if he *lets alone*, if he leaves free, gives scope to, evil practices in his own house: it is his business to coerce evil, if he cannot secure good.*

¹ Verse 18.

² Verse 19.

³ Verse 20.

Thou lettest alone the woman, or thy wife, Jezebel, who¹, calling herself a prophetess, a person with a message from God, both teacheth and misleadeth my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. The general tendency of the error is the same which we read of at Ephesus and at Pergamos. The teaching of the Jezebel of Thyatira is of the same character with that of the Nicolaitans of Ephesus, and of the Nicolaitans and followers of Balaam at Pergamos. But the language of the passage before us, read simply and naturally, as we should desire to read all the words of Holy Scripture, would seem to say that at Thyatira, whether in the family of the pastor of the Church or not, there was a personal influence at work, the example and persuasions of some well-known woman, in the direction of Antinomianism and of immorality. And just as the work of Balaam was in some places being done over again—so unchanged is human nature in all ages—whole generations and centuries after his decease; so in this place there was the character and work of the infamous queen Jezebel being re-exemplified and re-enacted; the character and work of her who held sway over a weak and unprincipled husband, and used that ascendancy for purposes of oppression, of licence, and of idolatry. *There was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord,*

¹ The addition of the accent, changing the article (η) into the relative (ἥ), is adopted above (not without hesitation) in correction of a more than usually defective construction.

whom Jezebel his wife stirred up¹. Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him...And Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him². Jeroboam for political purposes had set up forbidden emblems of worship³; but Ahab first introduced the open worship of false Gods, and it was his wife Jezebel who stirred him up to do so. Thus she became the type of all those who in any age exercise a woman's influence on the side of ungodliness, licentiousness, and idolatry. Such an influence was at work in the Church here addressed.

And⁴ I gave her time that she might repent; and she is not willing to repent out of, so as to leave, her fornication. Even the wickedest person, man or woman, has time given him for repentance. God hates nothing that He has made. He wills not the death of any sinner, but rather that he should turn and be saved, should repent and live⁵. It was so even with the immoral person here spoken of. Time was given her; but she would not use it. There was no will to repent. Therefore for the sake of others the time must

¹ 1 Kings xxi. 25.

² 1 Kings xvi. 30, 31, 33.

³ 1 Kings xii. 26, 27, 28.

⁴ Verse 21.

⁵ Ezek. xviii. 32. 2 Pet. iii. 9.

now be shortened, and after one more trial judgment must follow.

Behold¹, I throw her on to a couch, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent out of, so as to abandon, her works. The bed of adultery shall be changed into a bed of sickness; the pleasures of sin into great tribulation.

And² her children I will slay in (with) death, I will surely and utterly put to death. And all the congregations shall learn in their terrible example that I am He who searcheth reins and hearts; and I will give to you, each one, according to your works.

If this woman and her partisans were members, as they may seem to have been, of the nominal Church in Thyatira, we shall be reminded here, in the bodily judgments of sickness and death denounced against them, of the words of St Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, with reference to a different and perhaps slighter form of disobedience, *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep³*; or again of his own sentence pronounced upon an offender against the rules of morality in an earlier part of the same Epistle, *For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of*

¹ Verse 22.

² Verse 23.

³ 1 Cor. xi. 30.

*the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*¹. It is a fearful thing to be brought nigh to God, as Christians are brought near to Him², in ordinance and in privilege, unless there be also a corresponding spirit; a will to submit to Him, and a hearty love of His service.

I would remark too, before we pass on, how expressly our Lord here claims for Himself the distinctive attributes of God. *I am He who searcheth reins and hearts. The righteous God, such is the language of Scripture, trieth the hearts and reins*³. And here Christ says, *I am He, all the congregations shall learn that I am He*, who doth so. O then there is no room for hesitation in asking of Him all that we would ask of God. We may well say in the Litany, *O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us miserable sinners...O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world, Grant us thy peace. I and my Father are one*⁴.

*But*⁵ *to you I say, the rest in Thyatira, all who have not this teaching, whosoever know not the deep things of Satan, as they say; I throw not upon you any other burden: only*⁶, *that which ye have, hold until I be come.*

One of the great snares of the early Church was a misplaced use of the term and idea of knowledge. We have all heard of the Gnostics as a great body of heretics in early days, having many subdivisions

¹ 1 Cor. v. 3, 4, 5. ² Heb. x. 31. xii. 22, 23. ³ Psalm vii. 9.

⁴ John x. 30.

⁵ Verse 24.

⁶ Verse 25.

under different modes of teaching. The name of the Gnostics is derived from the word which means knowledge. They were those who professed to seek or to have found a keener and deeper insight into the mysteries of truth than other men possessed. They were fond, we may suppose, of the expression, *deep things*. They talked much, I doubt not, of *the deep things of God*; an expression borrowed perhaps, in sound though not in sense, from St Paul's words in an Epistle already referred to, *The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*¹. It seems doubtful whether they did not even talk of their insight into *the deep things of Satan*; perhaps into the mystery of his existence as a power of evil, of his fall from good, of his mode of tempting, if not—entering upon still more perilous ground—of the details of actual sin, as learned by tasting for oneself of the forbidden thing. Our Lord here addresses those who have been wise enough to remain ignorant of such knowledge. To you I speak, who know not the depths of Satan, as they say; who have not followed them into the mysteries of their occult science, but have preferred to follow the Gospel rule, *I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil*². Upon you I throw no new burden: I only bid you hold fast that which you have, until I come. The burden which you have already, is that of which we read at the close of the 11th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel; *Take my*

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 10.² Rom. xvi. 19.

*yoke upon you, and learn of me...and ye shall find rest unto your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*¹. From this burden, the burden of faith and love, of entire trust and of watchful obedience, I cannot release you: to do so would be to sever you from rest and from happiness, and to subject you again to that other yoke, *the law of sin and death*², from which I died and rose again to set you free.

*And*³ *he that conquereth and keepeth my works unto the end, I will give him authority over the nations: and*⁴ *he shall shepherd, or rule, them with an iron rod, as the pottery vessels, the works of the potter, are shattered; as I also have received from my Father.* The faithful servant of Christ shall partake in that power which God has given to Him over the nations. The reference is to the words of the 2nd Psalm, *Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee: Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron: Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*⁵. The promise made to the Christian victor is that he shall share in this dominion. *Do ye not know*, St Paul asks of the Corinthian Christians, as though it were a first principle of revelation, *that the saints shall judge the world*⁶? *Like sheep they are laid in the grave*, it is said of the wicked in the 49th Psalm; *death shall feed on them; and the upright shall*

¹ Matt. xi. 29, 30.² Rom. viii. 2.³ Verse 26.⁴ Verse 27.⁵ Psalm ii. 7, 8, 9.⁶ 1 Cor. vi. 2.

*have dominion over them in the morning*¹. *I saw thrones, says the Prophet in a later chapter of this Book, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years*². *Them also which sleep in Jesus will God, in the day of His second coming, bring with Him*³, with Jesus; and they shall be the assessors of His work of judgment. *He, the Christian conqueror, shall rule them with a rod of iron... even as I also have received of my Father.*

There is yet another and to our ear a sweeter promise. *And*⁴ *I will give him the morning star.* In the last chapter of the Book we read, *I Jesus am the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star*⁵. The words before us are therefore, *I will give myself to him.* But myself especially in one character; as the light of life; as the light which springs up in the morning after a long night of gloom and storm; as the joy and the comfort of the weary watcher, the compensation for long waiting, and the prize of long struggling. It is not wholly unlike the words of St Peter with reference to the prophetic word; *Whereunto ye do well if ye give heed, as to a lamp giving light in a murky place, until day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts*⁶. The promise is, that that day shall dawn, that that day-star shall at last rise upon our hearts. Even in this life, if we struggle on in faith and patience, with an

¹ Psalm xlix. 14.² Rev. xx. 4.³ 1 Thess. iv. 14.⁴ Verse 28.⁵ Rev. xxii. 16.⁶ 2 Pet. i. 19.

assured and assuring hope; hereafter, in the day of Christ's appearing, with perfect joy and full salvation.

Let¹ him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit saith to the congregations.

Our subject for to-night has been long and various: let us not separate without an earnest effort to fix in our hearts two or three at least of its special lessons for ourselves.

1. Happy is he of whom it can be said by the Searcher of hearts, that his latest works are more than his earliest. Let each ask himself, Can this be said of me? However far I may now be from Christian perfection, or even from a Christian maturity, yet can I hope that I am getting forward, that I am, in the highest sense of all, improving? Does the word of Christ come to me with a little more of power and of reality than it once did? Is my attention more firmly fixed in reading or listening to it? Have I more interest in the things of God and Christ and the soul? Then again, am I a little more successful in the struggle with my sins, with my besetting sin most of all? Am I a little less selfish, or a little less proud, or a little less irritable, or a little less passionate, or a little less perverse, than I once was? Is my heart, with its affections and lusts², at all more under my control? Is my life at all more useful, more diligent, more self-denying, in things small or great, than once it was? O I need not enumerate all these particulars: which

¹ Verse 29.

² Gal. v. 24.

of us does not know whether the life of his soul is healthy or sickly¹, improving, standing still, or going backward? Then carry the question home: Can Christ say of me, that my last works are more than the first?

2. A second point which forces itself upon our notice in this passage is the special responsibilities of women in reference to the character of the Christian body in any particular place; the power which they possess, for good or else for evil, in giving the tone to society, and practically settling the amount of influence which religion shall have upon the world in which they move. I speak not here of such abominations as those to which Thyatira was a victim. Such things have been in later days, in courts and in private houses, even in our own land: but, God be praised, the progress of right feeling, and the example of rulers, has at least made them hide themselves, and where they now exist, they exist not by sufferance but by stealth, luring the unwary secretly, or masking themselves under hypocrisy. But none the less on that account is the warning one for all times, that upon women rests in large measure the responsibility of the life and conduct of individuals and of communities with reference to religion and the Gospel. If they are ashamed of Christ; if they do not speak plainly in defence of right and good; if they listen complacently to that worldly language which sets God aside, or to that dangerous trifling which, half in pretence and

¹ 3 John 2.

half in reality, *makes a mock of sin*¹; more than this, if they do not take care to be themselves both exemplary in conduct, and thoroughly devout in feeling and observance; they may depend upon it that, thus far at least, their influence over the world is all but omnipotent; they have the control of its society, if not of its business or of its politics, and even as they are, in tone, principle, and feeling, such in these respects, and not higher or better, will the world of men be.

3. A third consideration solemnly presses itself; namely, the constant side-growth of carelessness wherever the true Gospel of the grace of God is preached and accepted: how the very angel of the church, in other respects faithful and accepted, may be *letting alone* a Jezebel by his side; how, in other words, there may be *a root of bitterness springing up to trouble*² a congregation or to defile a soul, not only in spite of, but even out of and because of the glorious Gospel which tells man of a free forgiveness. And not to dwell again upon a topic presented for consideration last Sunday, let us add now one word upon what I may call the retaliations of sin; how soon the bed of self-indulgence becomes the bed of suffering, and one who has sought it in wantonness may have to keep it in punishment. Yes, indeed, a volume might be written, *written within and without*, and written in burning words of *lamentation and mourning and woe*³, upon the one familiar yet awful sentence, *Be sure your sin will find you out*⁴. You cannot go one step aside

¹ Prov. xiv. 9.

² Heb. xii. 15.

³ Ezek. ii. 10.

⁴ Numb. xxxii. 23.

from perfect uprightness or perfect purity, without some real and probably perceptible consequence of suffering. And this—for so the words on which I am commenting warn us—not so much in the form of a punishment appended or affixed to sin by God the Judge of all, but rather in the form of a punishment inflicted by the sin itself; a punishment which is itself the very sin developed; that very thing in its full-blown maturity which looked so attractive in the germ and bud. Every inordinate affection, every vile imagination, every act of unfaithful, unrighteous, or dishonest stewardship, has in its hand, so to speak, the lash which is to scourge it, and we ourselves are made, in God's fearful yet most just economy, the executioners of our own vengeance. *Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her deeds.*

4. And thus, fourthly, we come back to the subject of this morning and of this whole season, the duty and necessity and healing mercy of repentance. *Except they repent.* Then, if they repent, punishment will hold its hand. And to repent is to be happy again; to be at one with God who is our happiness; to be at home again after long exile; to be at rest again after sore tossings. Repentance is not a terror: when rightly understood, it is a cup of blessing. And he who asks for it shall have. But if we have not, if, in other words, we ask not, then we frustrate all God's designs of good towards us. If He has to say of any one of us, old or young, rich or poor, in this congregation, *I gave him*

space, I gave her space, to repent, and he repented not, she repented not; then indeed there is no ministry to be looked for save the ministry of punishment¹, that one ministry which has in it only gloom, only misery, because we have despised mercy and would not have the love of the Lord².

5. Again, and very briefly, observe, in this respect also, the tenderness of Christ; that to those who will carry His yoke³, to those who desire to submit themselves to His discipline, He makes it very gentle; He is not always adding to it; He is not either constantly or at intervals, throwing upon the galled neck a little more, and yet a little more, of weight and of pressure, but on the contrary utters this promise in the words before us, *Upon you I will put none other burden: only, that which ye have already, hold fast till I come*. Upon the servants of sin, the willing captives of evil, those who are determined to hold to that which they know will be their ruin, upon them He does impose new burdens: He makes sin very oppressive, at times very irksome, sickening in its after-taste if not at the moment⁴: upon them He lays an ever tightening and growing thralldom, by which the sinner is made to testify against himself that, if the ways of God are *ways of pleasantness*⁵, the path of sin is a path of thorns and snares, of remorse and wretchedness. But upon those who strive to walk in His ways, upon those who do not desire to taste forbidden knowledge or become acquainted by experience with the depths of Satan,

¹ Heb. x. 26, 27.² Prov. i. 29, 30.³ Matt. xi. 29.⁴ Micah vi. 13.⁵ Prov. iii. 17.

upon those who know their own weakness and trust only in their Saviour's strength, upon them He will lay no new, no other burden: only let them patiently carry that which they have already carried, and keep that narrow path in which they have already walked, and they shall find it every day easier and more tolerable; one day shall teach another, and one night testify to another¹; till at length He Himself shall come, and then the eternal day dawns, and the day-star arises finally upon their hearts.

6. Finally, let them know that the service of Christ is a service not of weakness, not of cowardice, but of strength and power. *To him that overcometh will I give power over the nations.* Already we see this in some degree verified. Knowledge, they say, is power: certainly faith is power, and certainly holiness is power. Not only it shall be. Do not read the promise before us as though it were altogether future. There is a fulfilment of it even now. *If ye have faith but as a grain of mustard seed*², ye shall be strong even to remove mountains. If you cherish holiness, which is, in other words, a spirit of self-dedication, of self-consecration to God, in your hearts ever so imperfectly, you will find that it will make you strong, even in this life, in the same degree in which it is itself yours. *Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him*³. It is so still. Those who do not love holiness, in their hearts fear it. Conscience bears it witness. In the long run,

¹ Psalm xix. 2.

² Luke xvii. 6.

³ Mark vi. 20.

like truth its sister, *it is great and shall prevail*. Like truth, it is the thing which is; and it shall stand when all that is not, all that is a lie, all idols, and all ungodliness, shall have passed back into nothingness. As the vessels of a potter shall all these be broken to shivers, and nothing shall be left in that day save God, and God's truth, and God's servants. May He grant that we in that day be amongst the true, the real, and the imperishable, having first turned (if it might be so) some others to righteousness¹ by the faintly reflected lustre of the bright and morning star!

¹ Dan. xii. 3.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT,
February 17, 1861.

LECTURE VI.

REVELATION III. I, 2.

Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.

BEHOLD therefore, St Paul says, *the goodness and severity of God*¹. I know not where we could find that combination of attributes more remarkably exemplified than in the Epistle, which comes before us this evening, to the church in Sardis.

It would be beside the mark of our present purpose to say anything of the history of Sardis. It was a celebrated and ancient city. The names of Croesus, of Cyrus, and of Alexander, are all connected with it. Long sieges and sudden surprises; demolitions by fire or earthquake often repeated, and reconstructions after each; a condition of importance under various empires, for almost twenty centuries, and at last a reduction to a mere village of paltry huts among scattered ruins; such

¹ Rom. xi. 22.

has been and such is Sardis, viewed apart from the Gospel by the light of common history. In this aspect it is a place almost without a moral, except that which can be read in all ruins and in all vicissitudes. But Sardis has a moral all its own, when we read it not in the light of common history but in the light of Holy Scripture and of the words of the risen and ascended Lord.

And¹ to the angel of the congregation in Sardis write. We know not when or by whose ministry or by what special providence the Christian community was founded in this city; nor are we acquainted, I believe, with the names of any of its first pastors. These things are interesting when they occur. Ephesus, Smyrna, and even Thyatira, have, as we have seen, some link of connection, slighter or stronger, with other records of the Christian history. But in Sardis we are left with the interest of the address itself; one of the keenest and most thrilling which ever proceeded out of the mouth of Christ.

These things saith He who hath the seven Spirits of God. The same expression occurs in the 1st chapter. *Grace be unto you and peace from Him which is and which was and which is to come, and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ².* When the holy and blessed Spirit of God is thus described in a sevenfold character, it is designed, no doubt, to express His diffusion (as we call it) through the universal Church; the manifold gifts and graces by which He pervades all

¹ Verse 1.

² Rev. i. 4.

the congregations of Christ's people everywhere. And here we are reminded that, wherever the Holy Spirit acts, He acts as the Spirit of Jesus; it is He who *has* the seven Spirits of God; even as the Holy Spirit is described in a well-known chapter of the Epistle to the Romans as *the Spirit of Christ*, no less than as *the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead*¹; and even as our Lord Himself says in His last discourse with the disciples, *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me*².

And the seven stars. Former remarks have familiarized us with this expression. *The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches*³; and Christ, the Lord of the churches, holds them all in His hand. It is only by His blessing and under His direction that any earthly ministry can be made efficient. The pastors of the congregation are in the hand of Christ: it may be for their encouragement to remember this, or it may be for their warning: but they are connected with Him by their office, and woe is unto them if in His hand they either sleep or sin!

I know thy works. Yes, that is so in every case; from Him who searches the heart nothing can be concealed: what does He see in this instance? *That thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.* Surely there never was a more terrible word than that. A name to live, and yet all the while dead! The nominal condition, we should all say, aggravates the actual. Better be dead,

¹ Rom. viii. 9, 11.

² John xv. 26.

³ Rev. i. 20.

and know it, and wear no disguise, and practise no hypocrisy, than clothe the ghastly skeleton with the semblance of vitality, and be dead indeed while in name thou livest. Alas that it should be needful for us to speak of such possibilities! But it is needful. We may fear that there are many cases, though veiled from human eyes, in which Christ the Judge of all sees death in life.

I would earnestly invite any persons here present who think that the description may perhaps be true of them, not to turn away from it. And that for many reasons. For truth's sake, for honesty's sake, to avoid self-deception, to avoid a fatal surprise when recovery and amendment will be names unknown. But to-night, most of all for another reason; because the words of Christ which follow are so wonderfully tender even to them. Grave and serious even beyond other words of His; yet still so tender; tender in their tone, but tender also in the concern which they express and in the hope which they foster.

Thou, who hast a name to live, and art in deed all the while dead, *be*¹ *watchful*; *become wakeful* is the exact expression; so precisely that of St Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*². Death, in this life, is but sleep. We do not dare to shut our ears against some awful words of Holy Scripture which speak of cases in which even here below a conscience is actually seared, and there is no such thing as a *renewing again unto repentance*³. But

¹ Verse 2.

² Eph. v. 14.

³ Heb. vi. 4, 6.

as a general rule the words are true of spiritual matters as well as of temporal, While there is life there is hope. *Become wakeful* is Christ's call even to the dead soul; yes, even (which is still more remarkable) to the nominally alive but really dead soul; *and strengthen the things remaining, which were about to die*; the tense is remarkable; *which were going to die* if I had not come and spoken to thee: *for I have not found thy works perfect*, or more exactly, *fulfilled or completed, before my God*. Death was in progress here; a process as it were of spiritual mortification was going on in the soul; some parts of it were already dead, and the numbness of death was creeping gradually onward and upward over the rest: soon it would be too late for the will to arrest the fatal work; but at this moment, Christ calling, and Christ quickening, and Christ enabling, it may be done. *Strengthen the things which remain*: by a vigorous and well-directed effort restore to firmness the relaxing and decaying parts of thy spiritual being: and needful is it, *for I have not found thy works completed*; fully done, in weight and tale and measure, *before my God*.

Whose works indeed are so? Who has not need to say, *I am an unprofitable servant*, not only for the reason given in the Gospel, *because I have done at best that only which was my duty to do*¹, but also, and far more, because I have done my duty scantily, imperfectly, intermittently, if not grudgingly? O we see

¹ Luke xvii. 10.

that God does examine and take account of our works ; and that it is reason enough for a solemn call to repentance, even that those works were not *fulfilled* as well as attempted !

Remember¹ then how thou hast received and didst hear ; call to mind the nature of that deposit of truth which has been left with thee, and of that instruction which Apostles and Evangelists gave thee ; and keep it ; hold it fast ; guard well and watchfully what thou hast been taught ; and repent. If then thou shalt not have been awake—it is the same word used in the 2nd verse, Become awake—if then, when a certain time shall arrive, thou art found not to have kept awake, I will come, more exactly I shall have come, my arrival will be an accomplished fact, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee ; or more precisely, during what sort of hour I shall have come upon thee : not only the very hour of my arrival, but even the sort of hour, shall be found to have been unknown to thee ; thou shalt be seen to have had no conception of the time of day or night fixed for my coming. The figure is familiar to us in the Gospels and Epistles. In the 24th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel², in the 12th chapter of St Luke's Gospel³, in the 5th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians⁴, in the 3rd chapter of the 2nd Epistle of St Peter⁵, the same comparison is used to denote the suddenness of Christ's second coming, and the fearful surprise of those to whom He

¹ Verse 3.

² Matt. xxiv. 43.

³ Luke xii. 39.

⁴ 1. Thess. v. 2.

⁵ 2 Pet. iii. 10.

comes. *Behold*, we read in the 16th chapter of this Book, *I come as a thief*¹. In one of the passages just mentioned it is said, as it is here implied, that it is only with regard to the unprepared, the unguarded, the sleeping portion of the Church that the figure employed will be appropriate. *But ye, brethren*, St Paul says to the Thessalonians, *are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief*². Sudden it will be, but to those who are watching for it it will not be a surprise.

*But*³ *thou hast a few names in Sardis, who defiled not their garments*. Names are used for persons: the relative employed is not *which* but *who*. Elsewhere the few things were against; it is said to Pergamos, *I have a few things against thee*⁴: here the many things are against, and the few things for. In Sardis there were a few, and only a few, who had not lost the purity of their baptismal dress. We need not ask how. St James tells us of a defilement arising from the world. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this...to keep himself unspotted from the world*⁵. St Jude tells us of a defilement arising from the flesh. *Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh*⁶. We can scarcely doubt that the latter was here, as elsewhere, as in all times, the chief defiler. *The inhabitants of Sardis*, we are told, *bore an ill repute among the ancients for their voluptuous habits of life*. Doubtless it was an ever-recurring snare to the Christians who

¹ Rev. xvi. 15.² 1 Thess. v. 4.³ Verse 4.⁴ Rev. ii. 14.⁵ James i. 27.⁶ Jude 23.

lived amongst them. So insidious are the lusts of the flesh; so mingled with amiable impulses; so easily excused as pardonable weaknesses; so perpetually with us, carried about in our very selves, not excluded even when the world is shut out, even when every living being is removed from us; carried into deserts with the hermit, carried into monasteries with the recluse; that we wonder rather, and admire the grace of God, if there be a few names undefiled in Sardis, than if many there be found corrupt; and our very hearts fail us when we think of the overwhelming difficulties through which the Christian soldier has to fight his way, if there be indeed any truth in the divine saying, *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they*, and as it is clearly intended, they only, *shall see God*¹.

And they shall walk with me in white garments; because they are worthy. He² that conquereth, even he shall clothe himself in white garments. Yes, such is the argument which must prevail with us, if any can, for not defiling our garments: the promise that, if only we can bear the fiery trial for a little while, through the Saviour's help, grace, and intercession, we shall then be allowed to *follow Him whithersoever He goeth*³, to walk about with Him (such is the figure) in the freedom of the Paradise above, clothed, even like Him, in *raiment white as the light*⁴. To those whose hearts are defiled already with sin this may seem but a poor prospect: they who have once tasted of the poisoned cup can

¹ Matt. v. 8.² Verse 5.³ Rev. xiv. 4.⁴ Matt. xvii. 2.

scarcely relish afterwards the *pure river of the water of life*¹ : they had rather hear of some Mahometan paradise, in which, after a probationary abstinence below, they might revel evermore in the gratifications of sense. But for those *few in Sardis* who have been enabled thus far to keep themselves pure, it is indeed a joy above other joys to look forward to a time when holiness, instead of a constant and an unequal struggle, shall have been made their second nature. And to those also, a larger number it may be amongst us, who have not been quite thus far blameless; to those who have felt the force of temptation, and have suffered it to come near to them, and have not wholly kept themselves from the accursed thing but who have also deeply repented, and have borne the scorching fire of remorse and punishment, and know what sin is in its vindictiveness towards those who would renounce and escape from it; to these also there will surely be a sweet sound in the promise here made to him that conquereth; not to him only who has kept himself pure, but to him also who through pain and shame and anguish has been brought safe at last into the victory wherewith Christ crowns His soldiers.

And I will not blot out his name out of the roll of life, that list of the saved, of which we hear so much in the later and latest chapters of this Revelation of St John²; his name shall not be erased from the record of the citizens of the heavenly city; *and I will acknowledge his name before my Father and before His angels.* The repre-

¹ Rev. xxii. 1.² Rev. xiii. 8. xx. 12. xxi. 27. xxii. 19.

sentation is, that there are those whose names will be erased from the book of life. It is the same distinction which is drawn in the Parable of the Marriage Feast, between the guests who sit down at the banquet, and the guests whom the King, when he comes in, permits to remain at it as *having on a wedding garment*¹. Perhaps we may say with Scriptural truth that the names of all of us are entered at Baptism as citizens of the heavenly city, but that not all will be found there when the books are opened in the judgment. A process of erasure is ever going on, beside the process of entering: when the soul has finally taken its choice for evil, when Christ is utterly denied on earth and trodden underfoot, when the defilement of sin has become inveterate and indelible, then the pen is drawn through the guilty name, then the inverted style smears the wax over the unworthy characters, and when the owner of that name applies afterwards for admittance, the answer is, *I know thee not: depart hence, thou willing worker and lover of iniquity*²!

On the other hand, there are those whose names will not be erased, but confessed openly before God and the holy Angels as true citizens because they have been first true combatants. *He that conquereth*. Not he who has been without sin. Not he who has never fallen. Not he who has been exempted by a happy disposition from the worst trials and temptations of a fallen nature. No, none of these. *Christ came not to call the righteous. They that be whole need not a physician*³. Not these: but they

¹ Matt. xxii. 10, 11, 12.

² Matt. xxv. 12. Luke xiii. 27.

³ Matt. ix. 12, 13.

rather who have had a hard fight for it with self and sin; with world and flesh and devil, separately now, and now combined; who fell often, but ever rose again; were often defeated, but never vanquished; were often struck down, but only upon their knees, and by the help of prayer and faith and patience were made conquerors at last through the grace of him that loved them. These, having confessed Christ below, shall be confessed by Him as His before His Father and before His angels.

Let¹ him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit saith to the congregations.

The subject thus unfolded has carried with it, point by point, its application. My last words for this evening will revert to the fragment read as the text. *Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.* Yet thou, even thou, *be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; so iniquity shall not be thy ruin².*

I suppose, if there is a case which we should call hopeless, a case which we shrink from in others with dislike and should deprecate in ourselves with trembling, it is the condition here described; that of one who has a name to live, and is dead. There is a hollowness about it and a practical disguise, if not a pretence and a hypocrisy, which is as abhorrent to our natural instincts, when we view it calmly, as to God's righteous judgment. It is often the one boast of a life, sometimes it is the one trust of a deathbed, Thank God, I am no hypocrite: no one can say of me that I ever professed religion.

¹ Verse 6.

² Ezek. xviii. 30.

Out of the very absence of *a name to live* is gathered a peradventure that we may not be dead. And wretched and miserable as it must be to a Christian friend or pastor to listen to the expression of so baseless a hope, we yet cannot deny that it was better to have been true to oneself than untrue, better not to have passed oneself off upon others as righteous when we were not so, than to have had a name to live and yet to have been all the while dead.

And yet there may be cases in which, almost with no word or wish of ours, the world gives us credit for being other and better than we are. Not only those of us who hold a sacred office, and who, in the absence of any reason for a contrary judgment, may naturally be supposed to mean what we say, and to be in some degree that to which we summon others; but amongst the congregation also there will always be persons of orderly life and Christian observance, of quiet deportment and temperate habits, to whom their neighbours naturally give the *name that they live*, believe them, in other words, to be Christians indeed, and act only a right and charitable part in so regarding them. Yet many even of these in the judgment of their Saviour may still be dead. There may be no heart in their religion, and nothing higher than nature in their decent life. Secret prayer may be neglected, and secret conflict unknown: the seemly dress may be the covering of a corpse, and observance of forms an apology for deadness of spirit. It is not that they are wrong to attend Christ's worship; not that they are wrong to lead blameless lives: not for these things does

Christ here condemn them. But He bids them remember that the life of the soul, like the life of the body, is a secret thing; that good conduct and right observance ought to spring out of a heart seeking after God and renewed by God's Spirit; and that, where this is not, there is no real though there be many an apparent sign of spiritual vitality; there may be, and there ought to be, a name to live, but the reality is not of life but of death.

My brethren, God sends you this timely message, to awaken you to self-examination and godly fear. But He does not send it to make you despair. He does not send it to make you think your case hopeless. He does not send it to shake your confidence in His fatherly love, or in His willingness to hear and to bless and to save you. Listen once again to the words which follow. *Become awake, and strengthen the things which remain, that were*, when I spoke, *ready to die*. At present you are asleep, lethargic, torpid; the energies of your immortal soul are not yet called out to make your salvation sure: they must become so; you must awaken to the concerns of your soul as you are already perhaps awake to those of your mind and of your body; you must become awake, and you must keep awake, for in your case sleep is disease, and disease is death.

How do we judge of sleep and waking in the case of a soul? How? As in the mind, as in the body. Is the soul in exercise? Its exercise is seeking God, communing with God, praying to God, going in and out and finding strength and comfort in His presence. Tried by this test, how many of us are awake, and how many

sleeping? Alas! we do not like to own it; but the state of the soul, in many a vigorous mind, and in many an active body, the state of the soul is one of confirmed and unresisted and unconscious paralysis. Well may Christ say to every soul, save perhaps a few, in this congregation—and those few will most of all bless Him for the summons—*Become wakeful. Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead*¹.

And He adds, in words of deep wisdom and comfort too, *Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die*. Christ never calls us to make something from nothing. There is in each of us just that little germ, or seed, or spark, which can by God's grace be expanded or quickened or kindled into more. Christ says to us, *You believe in God: believe also in me*². Or, *You call me Lord, Lord*³: now mean the thing that you say. Or, You are attentive to many duties: you are a kind father, a dutiful son, a just master, a diligent servant: now do all these things from a higher motive; from a sense of Christian duty; out of love to me. Or, You make many exertions to attend my worship; you listen respectfully, you pray reverently: now come hither with a view to meeting me; desire my help and my love; ask for it, seek it, knock at the gate, until you are heard and answered. Or, You avoid many sins; you count many indulgences degrading and sinful; you practise temperance, you abhor profaneness, you shun gross misconduct, you cannot bear the openly sinful: but hitherto you have too

¹ Eph. v. 14.² John xiv. 1.³ Luke vi. 46.

much (whether it be known to yourself or unknown) followed inclination in your war with evil: now begin to look within and see whether there be not in your bosom some secret thing which God approves not, and call in my help, as a power real and trusted in, to enable you to dislodge and to expel it. Be not satisfied with a half-service: be a soldier all over, and follow my banner across the whole world of evil! Strengthen thus the weak dying elements of Christian grace; and in the end perhaps even thou, thou that hast now but a name to live and art dead, shalt find thyself one of those blessed conquerors, who *shall walk with me in white*, and hear their *names confessed before my Father and before His angels*.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

February 24, 1861.

LECTURE VII.

REVELATION III. 8.

Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.

THERE is an eloquent passage in the great *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, in which the writer, an unbeliever and a scoffer at the Gospel, describes the state of the seven Churches of Asia Minor after the Turkish conquest in the 14th century.

The captivity or ruin of the seven Churches of Asia was consummated...In the loss of Ephesus, the Christians deplored the fall of the first Angel, the extinction of the first candlestick, of the Revelations: the desolation is complete; and the temple of Diana, or the church of Mary, will equally elude the search of the curious traveller. The circus and three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes; Sardes is reduced to a miserable village; the God of Mahomet...is invoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamus; and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved...At a distance

from the sea, forgotten by the Emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above fourscore years ; and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect, a column in a scene of ruins.

It is an error, I think, to see in this exception, this exemption of Philadelphia from the desolation of Ephesus or of Sardis, a fulfilment of prophecy. The addresses before us are all directed not to cities, but to churches. Probably the church, that is, the Christian body, in each of them formed but a small part of the population : its state, whether zealous or lukewarm, whether stedfast or backsliding, affected probably but in a slight degree the heathenism which surrounded it : the promises given to each are spiritual not temporal ; and the existence in the nineteenth century of a populous Mahometan town on a spot where once a Christian angel taught and guided his congregation, cannot in any sense be looked upon as the reward of their faith or the result of his self-sacrifice. It is by such misinterpretations of Scripture, and more particularly by such attempts to discover fulfilments of prophecy where they are irrelevant or visionary, that great dishonour has been done to the cause of Christ, and the unbeliever himself has been furnished with those shafts of ridicule of which I thought it right to omit more than one in the passage just quoted. Let us turn now from the words of man to the words of God.

And¹ to the angel of the congregation in Philadelphia write: These things saith the Holy, the True.

There are times, my brethren, when these attributes, which sound in some ears almost severely, come to us with a force and an attractiveness possessed by no other. In seasons of unbelief and darkness, such as will come now and then to all men, I believe there is no argument for the Gospel so powerful as the holiness of Christ: it is worth whole volumes of evidences, the impression left upon the mind by His absolutely blameless life, by His perfect purity, by His entire freedom from guile, by His abhorrence of evil in every shape and form and guise. And at other times also, when we are sorely tossed and buffeted by inward temptation; when our iniquities press heavily upon us, not so much with the desire for forgiveness, as with the longing for freedom, the question, *Who shall deliver me from this body of death²* which I carry about with me in my own corruptions? then to think of One who is absolutely holy, *separate* in that sense *from sinners³*, tempted like us *yet without sin⁴*, of One whom to know is to be free, whom to reach is to be out of reach of evil, is a rest and refreshment to the soul such as no promise of forgiveness (could it be made) without holiness can ever be, and of all Christ's glorious characteristics, this will shine out as the very brightest and most comforting, which describes Him under the terms, *He that is holy, the Holy One.*

¹ Verse 7.

² Rom. vii. 24.

³ Heb. vii. 26.

⁴ Heb. iv. 15.

He that is true. He that cannot deceive. He on whose lips is no guile. He who tells us the thing which is, and who never swerves from it. He who speaks that which He knows, and keepeth His promise for ever. What a refuge from this world's broken promises, and from man's vain guesses at truth !

He that hath the key of David, that openeth and no one shall shut, and He shutteth and no one shall open. The words are quoted from a remarkable passage in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, with reference to the removal of one treasurer, and the appointment of another, over the royal house of Judah. *And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim... and I will clothe him with thy robe...and I will commit thy government into his hand...and the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder ; so he shall open, and none shall shut ; and he shall shut, and none shall open*¹. The key was the badge of office ; of that office to which it belonged to open or to refuse to open, to shut or to refuse to shut, each closet and compartment of the royal treasury. It has pleased our Lord to employ this figure here with reference to His own position in the House of God. In returning to the words as here applied, we may pause for a moment at a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which will show us what God's house is and what is Christ's place in it. We there read, *Who (Christ Jesus) was faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses was faithful in all His*

¹ Isai. xxii. 20, 21, 22.

house, the house of God: the words are quoted from the 12th chapter of the Book of Numbers¹. And then at a later verse; *And Moses verily was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after: but Christ as a Son over His own house*, or as it might be again rendered, *His*, that is, God's house: *whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end*². Over this house then, this house which we are if we are Christians indeed, Christ holds the office, in every sense, of opening and of shutting at His will. He dispenses and He withholds God's treasures. He gives or He denies this or that talent, this or that position, this or that opportunity, this or that blessing. In a yet more solemn meaning of the words, it is His to admit into and His to exclude from the eternal kingdom of glory. In spiritual and eternal things, wherever there is a door, Christ has the key of it. Now let us hear the present application of this title.

I³ know thy works; behold, I have given before thee a door opened, which no one can shut. The figure of an open door is of almost frequent use in Scripture, and particularly in the writings of St Paul. Thus in his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, he says, *But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost: for a great door and effectual has been opened unto me, and there are many adversaries*⁴. Again, in the following Epistle; *Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach*

¹ Numb. xii. 7.

² Heb. iii. 2, 5, 6.

³ Verse 8.

⁴ 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9.

*Christ's Gospel, and a door was opened unto me in the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother*¹. And once more, in the Epistle to the Colossians; *Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance (a door of the word,) to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds*². And the same expression occurs in the 14th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles: *They rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened to the Gentiles a door of faith*³. In all these places the word *door* is exactly equivalent to our expression, an *opening*. An opening was made for me to preach Christ's Gospel. I found a large *opening* at Ephesus. At Troas God made an *opening* for me. To the Gentiles God gave an *opening* for the reception of the faith. Thus the assurance to the Christians of Philadelphia will be, that Christ has made an *opening* for them; an opening, I think we may say, for doing His work on earth, and an opening for their final entrance into those *many mansions* of which He Himself holds the key.

Because thou hast a little strength, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name.

Such is the character to which the reward of the *open door* is promised. *A little strength*, not perfect, not triumphant strength, not to be boasted of, not to be trusted in, but still strength, real strength, a little real strength. It is very encouraging to those of us

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 12, 13.

² Col. iv. 3.

³ Acts xiv. 27.

who are at all in earnest, to see how Christ recognizes and appreciates a little thing in His service. There is all the difference in the world between a little and none; between a few things and nothing; between imperfection and death. *A little strength* implies many prayers and many struggles; it is not the state of one who lets himself alone; it is not the state of one who lives without God and thinks scorn of Christ. He who has even a little strength is described as keeping Christ's Word, and not denying His name. He treasures that which he has been taught, and neither in word nor by act says that he knows Him not. The reward then of *a little strength* is *a door opened*. And one illustration of the meaning of that promise is given in the words which next follow.

Behold¹, I give some of the synagogue of Satan, of those who say of themselves that they are Jews, and they are not, but lie; behold, I will make them that they shall have come—by a certain time their coming will be a fact accomplished—and shall be worshipping before thy feet, and may know that I loved thee. We have heard something more of those here described, in the message to the church of Smyrna. They are those who loudly claim for themselves the title of children of Abraham, and yet bear no trace of his likeness². They may be inside the Church, or outside; Judaizing Christians, or persecuting Jews; men such as those against whom St Paul waged so

¹ Verse 9.

² Matt. iii. 9. John viii. 39.

earnest a warfare, who, while professing to believe in Christ, held the necessity of completing His salvation by obedience to the ceremonial law¹; or else such as those *who killed the Lord Jesus and persecuted*² His Apostles everywhere, who rejected altogether the truth of the Gospel, and made it an act of religion to destroy such as called on Christ's name. The promise here is, that of these Christ will grant some to the faithful labours of the church of Philadelphia. Some of them shall be convinced and converted by their life and doctrine, and brought to acknowledge the faith which once they laboured to destroy.

A further promise follows. *Because*³ *thou didst keep the word of my patience*, that word of mine which demands patience, and teaches patience, and gives a motive for patience, and shows where patience may be found, *I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth.* We may suppose that the trial here predicted is one of those general persecutions throughout the Roman empire which recurred from time to time during the first three centuries, and in which many, who had seemed in smoother times to be running well, made shipwreck altogether of their faith and hope. To the Christians at Philadelphia, who without very loud professions or very splendid successes had yet a little strength, had kept Christ's word and not denied His name, it is promised, not

¹ Acts xv. 1.² 1 Thess. ii. 15.³ Verse 10.

perhaps that they should be exempted from persecution—that might have been a doubtful blessing—but that Christ, according to the exact terms employed, would *keep them out of it*, that is, would so keep them inwardly by His almighty power that they should be enabled to escape out of it without loss of courage and fidelity. If He might not keep them from trial¹, He might yet keep them out of it; so keep as that they should escape its real risk, that of *drawing back unto perdition*².

I³ am coming quickly: hold that which thou hast, that no one receive thy crown. Let this be your encouragement; let this be, if necessary, your warning: *I am coming*, yes, *coming quickly*. For you at least individually, coming quickly. Soon will death be here; and that for you is, in many respects though not in all, the day of His coming. Whole centuries may yet have to run, after you are laid in the grave, before the second Advent of your Lord: but at death probation ends, and responsibility; doubt and danger, temptation and infirmity: from that day, for you, dates the Advent: hold fast till then, and the crown, the wreath or garland which encircles the head of the victor, that incorruptible, imperishable wreath of which St Paul speaks in his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians⁴, will be for ever securely yours. *That no one receive thy crown.* Using the figure (as in the passage just referred to) of the public games of Greece, the Chris-

¹ John xvii. 15.

² Heb. x. 39.

³ Verse 11.

⁴ 1 Cor. ix. 25.

tian runner or the Christian combatant is charged to beware lest the garland which a little watchfulness and a little perseverance would have secured to him should fall to another's lot. It is a figure not to be pressed beyond its measure. No Christian was ever the gainer by a brother's loss: no man ever really won the garland of another: in the hands of the Judge of our contest are crowns enough for all, and he who wins not his own will not take another's.

He¹ that conquereth, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; and forth he shall not go out. It is a little striking, as a mere coincidence, that travellers describe, among the few ruins of Philadelphia at this day, four strong marble pillars standing in one spot, which once supported the dome of a church, and on the sides of these pillars inscriptions. It is added, *One solitary pillar of high antiquity has been often noticed, as reminding beholders of the remarkable words in the Apocalyptic message to the Philadelphian Church, Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out.*

The promise is that of a secure and permanent position in God's heavenly temple. Philadelphia is said to have been singularly liable to earthquakes: not a building, common or sacred, but it might suddenly fall in ruins: the promise here made is, that no such risks shall await the heavenly temple, or

¹ Verse 12.

those who have been built into it. The general figure will resemble that of other passages of Scripture in which individual Christians are compared to the stones of which the temple of God is built; as when St Paul says in his Epistle to the Ephesians, *In whom, even in Christ, all the building, or perhaps more exactly, every separate part of the building, fitly framed together groweth into an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also, individually, are being built up together for an habitation of God in the Spirit*¹. Or, as St Peter says again, in his first Epistle, *To whom, even to Christ, coming, a living stone...ye also yourselves, as living stones, are being built up, a spiritual house*².

And I will grave upon him—we heard just now of the inscriptions upon the pillars—*the name of my God*; that is what gives him a right to be there, he belongs to God; he is one of the consecrated and dedicated ones, in whom God is by the Spirit: *and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, she who descendeth out of heaven from my God*; that is his description; he is one of the citizens of the heavenly city, of that city which is now in heaven with God, and which shall one day be manifested as God's abiding-place with man: *and finally, my new name*; that name of which we read in the Epistle to Pergamos, that *no man knoweth it saving he that receiveth it*³; that name which is a secret between Christ and Christ's servant, inasmuch as it expresses a relation-

¹ Eph. ii. 21, 22. ² 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. ³ Rev. ii. 17.

ship into the very meaning of which the world cannot enter.

Let¹ him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit saith to the congregations.

We have endeavoured to do this as we read: the application has accompanied the interpretation. And now the time is short: we can afford but one topic of concluding exhortation: let that be the few words read as the text, *Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.* We shall take the words in two senses, and speak of a door of opportunity, and a door of admission.

1. I know not whether we quite appreciate the promise in its former sense. To those of us who have *a little strength* Christ promises openings for His service. Naturally we are well contented to let that service alone. Of our own personal safety, our own deliverance in the day of judgment, we do sometimes think. *If it would please God to pardon my sin and take me,* is a very common aspiration when sickness or trouble is upon us. And our idea of the happiness of heaven is much the same: a place of tranquillity, a place where *the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest*², such is the heaven which most of us picture: and can we wonder if to active minds and vigorous bodies such a heaven offers few attractions to overbear the temptations of things that are seen?

¹ Verse 13.

² Job iii. 17.

Christ deals with us in greater wisdom, when He offers to His servants an open door. It is a far nobler thing, and to noble natures far more alluring, to say, Work for me, than to say, Repose in me; to say, I have something for thee to do, something which will task all thy energies, something which will arouse every dormant power, something which will be of use to me and to my brethren, something which will show thy gratitude not in words but in deeds, than to say, Work is over, now rest; enter into a paradise of recreation and of contemplation; there enjoy thyself, there forget toil, there know what it is to be free from responsibilities, there learn what it is to be unoccupied and yet blameless.

There are many persons in this day who are looking out for a mission. Man's mission, and woman's mission; a sphere (as it is called) of Christian usefulness; something new, something untried, something in which we may be the first, something which may be spoken of as our enterprise and our achievement: these are ideas floating in many minds, whether as dreams, as projects, or as employments. It is the way of our time: people want some new thing, and happily there is no lack of new things to be learned and to be done. Each new scheme of Christian benevolence has its use, has its place, has its blessing, if only it be begun, continued, and ended in God.

In the meantime, let Christ Himself stand amongst us and say to each one, *I have set before thee*, thee personally, thee individually, *an open door!* Do not

imagine that my work is to be done only in new ways or by original minds: in the trivial round, in the common duty, in intercourse with others in the house and in the street, in the faithful and regular fulfilment of each relation of life, in kindness to a few poor neighbours, in visiting a few sick folk, in helping to instruct the ignorant, in caring for souls that lie in darkness, in a thousand ways, each by itself simple and humble; thou mayest glorify me, and serve thy generation ere thou fall on sleep. Only take heed that all be indeed done for me, and in my name and strength, and in the energy of a redeemed soul, and I will set before thee, day by day, an open door, some opportunity of quiet usefulness, in which thou mayest serve me, and in which I will be glorified. The reward of Christ's servants in this life is, in its measure, the same with that spoken of as reserved for them hereafter, *His servants shall serve him*¹.

Do not think that it is a light thing to have a door opened before you by Christ. Many persons miss it altogether by keeping their eyes fixed on the earth. Many others say to themselves when they see it, *To-morrow, to-morrow*, and before to-morrow it is closed. And many try to push rudely through it, in their own way and in their own strength; and somehow they never pass the entrance; they have no passport; they are turned back at the door, or they *stumble and are snared*² just inside it.

¹ Rev. xxii. 3.

² Isai. viii. 15.

Let these few hints be as words to the wise, that they appreciate as they ought, with reference to opportunities, the gracious promise, *Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.*

2. But, finally, the door is a figure not for opportunity only, but also for entrance and admission. We have all heard and (I would hope) trembled at the saying, *And the door was shut*¹. That pregnant phrase for exclusion may teach us what its opposite is, a door opened; opened to admit, opened to welcome, opened to receive and to entertain. Those who have even a little strength, those who keep Christ's Word, those who do not deny Him before men, shall find the door of His heavenly presence; not closed before them, but opened: He will guide them towards it: He, as they fight their way up to it, will cover their head and nerve their arm; He, as they pass through it, will hail them as *good and faithful servants*, and *make them glad for ever with the joy of His countenance*².

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

¹ Matt. xxv. 10.

² Matt. xxv. 21. Psalm xxi. 6.

LECTURE VIII.

REVELATION III. 15.

I would thou wert cold or hot.

It is not perhaps without some regret that we find ourselves at the last of the Epistles to the seven churches. God grant that our study of them may not have been quite in vain! May He grant His special blessing to that last and most solemn admonition which He sends to us to-night in the address to the church of Laodicea.

The name of Laodicea is not wholly unknown to us either in history or in Scripture. We read of it in the letters of the great Roman Orator, who visited it, and administered justice there, in his capacity of Proconsul of Cilicia. We read of it, more than a century afterwards, as totally destroyed by an earthquake, but restored, without aid from Rome, by the exertions of the inhabitants themselves. Of the subsequent ruin of the city in the Turkish invasion during the 14th century, we heard last Sunday. Modern travellers speak of its present state as one of blank dreariness. *Nothing can exceed*, says one of these, *the desolation and melancholy appearance of the site of Laodicea: no picturesque features*

in the nature of the ground on which it stands, relieve the dull uniformity of its undulating and barren hills; and with few exceptions, its grey and widely scattered ruins possess no architectural merit to attract the attention of the traveller. Yet it is impossible to view them without interest, when we consider what Laodicea once was, and how it is connected with the early history of Christianity. It is indeed in that connection that its name still lives amongst us.

We know not for certain by whose preaching Laodicea received the Gospel. Yet, lying as the city did near the great Roman road from Ephesus to the East, we can scarcely doubt that St Paul himself, in one of his journeys *throughout Phrygia*¹, or *over all the country of Phrygia*², of which we read in the 16th and 18th chapters of the Acts, was its first Apostle and Evangelist. There is an ambiguous expression on this subject in the Epistle to the Colossians. *I would have you know how great conflict I have for you and for them in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh*³. Does he assert, as many have imagined, that both the Colossian and Laodicean converts were among those whom he had never personally visited? Or may we not rather understand him as distinguishing between those at Colossæ and Laodicea who had, and others who had not, seen his face in the flesh⁴? In addition to the great

¹ Acts xvi. 6.² Acts xviii. 23.³ Col. ii. 1.

⁴ If, in reading the verse commented upon, the emphasis is strongly laid upon the word *not*, the sense will be that expressed in the latter of the above alternatives.

improbability of his having overlooked two places of interest and importance when making a missionary journey more than once through the region in which they were situated, we can scarcely read the Epistle to the Colossians without inferring that both that church itself and the neighbouring congregation in Laodicea were bound to the writer by close ties of personal intercourse. Thus we read in the 4th chapter, *Salute the brethren in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the congregation at his house*¹. The Christians at Laodicea appear to have met for worship at the house of Nymphas, one probably of their richer brethren. *And when my letter has been read among you, cause that it be read also in the congregation of the Laodiceans*—the two places were very near together—and *see that ye also read the epistle from Laodicea*; that is, not a letter written from Laodicea, but a letter which would reach them from Laodicea. The probability is that the letter which St Paul thus describes is not any lost letter, but that which we possess as the Epistle to the Ephesians; headed, according to one tradition, *the Epistle to the Laodiceans*, and designed probably as a circular letter, to be sent by turns to all the congregations in that district, which acknowledged St Paul as their great and first Apostle.

St Paul had *a great conflict for them in Laodicea*. His heart yearned over them, and struggled for them in prayer. Not without cause, as the address now before us indicates.

¹ Col. iv. 15, 16.

And¹ to the angel of the congregation in Laodicea write: *These things saith the Amen.* *Amen* is the Hebrew word for *Verily*. It is the expression either of strong affirmation or of hearty assent. No word is more familiar to us. It closes every confession and every prayer and every thanksgiving. Most of all familiar is it to us in the discourses of our Lord. *Verily I say unto you. Verily, verily, I say unto you.* St Paul says, in his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, with regard to *all the promises of God, In Him (Christ) is yea, and in Him Amen*²: in Christ is affirmation, and in Christ is verity. Even as He said of Himself in His discourse with Nicodemus, *Verily, verily, (Amen, Amen,) I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen*³. In man's teaching about God and heavenly things, there must be something of uncertainty if not of conjecture; but Christ is *the Amen, the Verily*, He who alone can speak with positiveness, as having come forth from, and continuing still one with, Him of whom He testifies.

These things saith the Amen, the trustworthy and true witness, the origin of the creation of God. As it is said in the opening words of St John's Gospel, *All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made which was made*⁴; or more exactly, *All things became, came into existence, by means of Him, and apart from Him came into being not even one thing which has come into being.* Or again, in the Epistle to the Colossians, *Who (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first-*

¹ Verse 14.² 2 Cor. i. 20.³ John iii. 11.⁴ John i. 3.

born of all creation; for in Him were created all things which are in heaven and which are on earth, the visible and the invisible...all things through Him and unto Him have been created, by His agency and for Him as their end and aim, and He is Himself before all, and all things in Him consist¹; He continues to all things their consistence and coherence; but for Him all things would dissolve and fall asunder. He is *the origin*, and He is the continuance, of the creation of God.

After this brief rehearsal of the claims to attention of Him who speaks, the message thus proceeds.

I² know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. So³, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth. Thy lukewarmness has made me sick of thee. We must hear more of the description before we can rightly apply it. *Because⁴ thou sayest, I am rich, and have grown rich, and in nothing have need, and knowest not that thou art wretched*—but there is a force beyond this in the original; *that thou art the wretched one and the pitiable one*; just as in the prayer of the Publican in the parable the full expression is, *God be merciful to me the sinner⁵*, to me who am by emphasis and by excess above others a sinner—and *knowest not that thou art the wretched one and the pitiable and beggarly and blind and naked*; *I⁶ counsel thee*—I who cannot approve, I who cannot flatter thee, I who must regard thy state with displeasure and even (as it is above said) with loathing, can yet and will

¹ Col. i. 15, 16, 17.

² Verse 15.

³ Verse 16.

⁴ Verse 17.

⁵ Luke xviii. 13.

⁶ Verse 18.

yet advise thee—*I counsel thee to buy gold, properly gold-coin, from me, tried by fire*¹, *that thou mayest grow rich, and white garments, that thou mayest cast them round thee, and so the disgrace of thy nakedness may not be shown; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes withal, that thou mayest see.* The advice of Christ is, in each particular, first to know the truth of our condition, to become aware of our spiritual poverty, our spiritual nakedness, and our spiritual blindness, and secondly to apply to Him for the relief of each. *To buy* of Him, He says; recalling the well-known figure of the Prophet Isaiah, *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price*². Such was the advice given, but too late, to the foolish Virgins in the parable, *Go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves: and while they went to buy the Bridegroom came*³. So may it not be with us whom Christ here counsels!

*As*⁴ *many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:* but there is again a force in the original, not to be lost sight of, arising from the place of the pronoun: *I, as many as I love;* or, *For my part...it is my wont:* unlike earthly friends, who cannot bear to speak a severe word to those whom they love; who can only bear to give present pleasure, even when they know, or might see, that it is

¹ Literally, *fired out of fire*; that is, *which has stood the test of fire, and has come forth from it pure and without alloy.* Compare 1 Pet. iv. 12, *Beloved, be not surprised at the firing (fiery process) which is happening in your case unto trial for you.*

² Isai. lv. 1.

³ Matt. xxv. 9, 10.

⁴ Verse 19.

misplaced and injurious; who keep their harsh words for their enemies, and lavish their soft words upon their friends; unlike them, I may rebuke, where it is needed, my sign of affection, and say to thee, not because I hate but because I love thee, *Be zealous therefore, and repent.*

Behold¹, I stand at the door, and knock. If any one shall have heard my voice, and opened the door, I will both come in to him, and will sup with him, and he himself with me. Such is the attitude of Christ towards sinners. Even towards the most unsatisfactory, even towards the most sinful, He patiently maintains that attitude till the very close of life. He is like one knocking at a closed door. I know not that any amplification of man could add anything to the significance or to the power of this comparison. We will reserve a few brief words of enforcement for our concluding application.

He² that conquereth, I will give to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father on His throne. On earth He had said, *Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel³.* But now it is promised that the twelve thrones shall be one throne, and that one throne the throne of Christ. The glory that shall be revealed shall be a glory of union with Christ; the glory not of assessors of Christ, not of companions of Christ, but of persons incorporated and as it were merged in Christ; the glory of those who have

¹ Verse 20.

² Verse 21.

³ Matt. xix. 28.

been found in Him¹, so that what He is they are, what He does they do, *because He lives they live also*², and *where He is there shall also His servant be*³. Thus are the words finally verified, *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*⁴.

*Let*⁵ *him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit saith to the congregations.*

The difficulties of exposition to-night have been few; and the materials for application many.

1. And first we must endeavour to understand the particular state of mind and life to which the reproofs and counsels of this passage are directed. *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot...thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot.* The phrase has passed into sermons and religious books; and no phrase could be more expressive. We all know the flat insipid vapid sickly taste of tepid water: what is the corresponding thing in character? Alas! I fear many of us have but to think what we are towards Christ and the things of Christ. Let us do so, my brethren. You see that one of the chief marks of a lukewarm Christian is self-ignorance and consequent self-satisfaction: O let us not have that mark upon us! Let us be very plain with ourselves, at all events! Christ sees us as we are: so let us do. He knows our works: O let us not be blind to them!

Neither cold, nor hot. Who may be described as *cold* towards Christ? Those, of course, first of all, who do not at all acknowledge Him; those who never visit His

¹ Phil. iii. 9.

² John xiv. 19.

³ John xii. 26.

⁴ John xvi. 33.

⁵ Verse 22.

house, or do so merely as a form; those who have no thought at all about Him, no pretence of gratitude, no sense whatever, at any time, of His goodness, of His forbearance, of His dying love. This surely is a dreadful state to be in. And yet in some respects it seems to be spoken of here as less dreadful than a lukewarm state.

On the other hand, who are described as *hot*, fervent and glowing towards Christ? Surely they whose whole heart responds to what He has done for them; they whose whole soul is kindled and warmed and illuminated by the love of Christ; they who can say, like St Paul, *The love of Christ constraineth me*¹; or, like St John, *We love Him, because He first loved us*²; or, like St Peter, *Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee*³. They whose whole life is one constant sacrifice of thankfulness and of devotion; they who can declare with truth that *it is no longer they who live, but Christ who lives in them*, and that *the life which they now live in the flesh they live by faith in the Son of God who loved them and gave Himself for them*⁴.

Between these two extremes are the lukewarm: and perhaps, if any such computation could be made with profit, this intermediate condition is of all the commonest. It is not that we are open unbelievers: it is not that we even doubt the truth of the atonement, or the certainty of the judgment, or the reality of an eternal world: it is not that we do not sometimes pray, sincerely and earnestly, for forgiveness and for a new spirit. Nor

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14.

² 1 John iv. 19.

³ John xxi. 17.

⁴ Gal. ii. 20.

is it perhaps that we are combining with our faith in Christ some definite sin; it is not that we are either living immoral lives, or tempting others to do despite to the convictions of their conscience. It is none of these things. Our state is one best described by negatives. We are not decided. We are not in earnest. We are not devoted. We are not at work for Christ. We have taken no line. We are not enlisted, or rather we are not serving—for enlisted we all are—in Christ's army. His enemies are not our enemies, nor His friends our friends. We are *not with Him*¹. When we hear of a sin, it does not wound us. When we hear of a glorious act of Christian heroism, it does not thrill us with emotion. When we pray, we do not go forth in heart and soul with our petition: when we praise God with our lips, there is no fire of thankful love in our breast: when we give alms, we do it without charity: when we sit by a bed of sickness, we are not entering with deep sympathy into the suffering in body, or the disease in soul, of him who lies there. In short, a lukewarm state in religion is just what the word itself expresses; something flat and spiritless and vapid and poor; something betwixt and between, a nondescript between two positives, itself neither this nor that; a state provoking and irritating by its very indefiniteness, by the impossibility of characterizing it, by its claim of a title which does not belong to it, of a standing-place which has no basis of reality.

2. Such is, in very rough outline, the character of the lukewarm, of the *neither cold nor hot*. We must place

¹ Luke xi. 23.

separately, as this passage teaches us to do, its special tendency to self-ignorance and self-deception. We might have thought that no one could exemplify this condition without being aware of it. We might have thought that the absence of all fervour and glow in our religion would be felt inwardly as a great want. No. The lukewarm Christian has a standard of his own, and he comes up to it. He may be perfectly satisfied with his attainments. Probably his notion of Christ's requirements is substantially that of his world; he and they *have agreed together*¹ to modify and soften down the severer and sterner demands of the Gospel; to say, This could not have been meant, nor this, nor this; to say, This will be enough, this will satisfy the spirit of Christ's law, if not its letter; and thus it scarcely occurs to him to feel any misgiving as to the approval of Christ or the award of His judgment. *Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.* Thus we learn to look upon self-satisfaction with peculiar suspicion. If we think that all is well with us, that we have only to go on as we are, and all will end well; we may be nearly sure that we are still in *the broad way* and have never *entered in at the strait gate*². This spirit is the very opposite of that upon which Christ's blessing is pronounced, when He says, *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness*³. The lukewarm Christian has no such hunger and thirst. He who is neither cold

¹ Acts v. 9.² Matt. vii. 13.³ Matt. v. 6.

nor hot is generally a self-satisfied man: he has no idea of needing a thorough change: he thinks himself safe and rich and in need of nothing, and never suspects himself of being all the time, in God's sight, wretched and poor and blind and naked. Would that it might please God to strike the arrow of His conviction through some self-complacent heart this night! If He could only see us self-accusing and self-emptied, then there would be room in us for the sweet entrance of His Gospel.

3. We shall notice, thirdly, the words themselves which were read as the text of this Sermon; *I would thou wert cold or hot*. We have heard what it is to be cold; and well might we wonder that Christ would have us rather cold than lukewarm. But we must all have noticed how peculiarly abhorrent to God is indecision and irresolution of character. There is no dealing with such a man. He is not one man; he is two men. You know not where you have him. What can you appeal to? How can you move him? What is he? It is as though heaven itself were impatient of such doublemindedness, provoked by the impracticability of such indecision. *I would thou wert cold or hot*: then might thy place be assigned thee; then might the mischief of thy misnomer be remedied, and thy power to mislead and to injure broken.

But there is more than this in the words before us. The lukewarm is really further from God's kingdom even than the cold. He is out of the reach of shocks. The terrors of the Lord fly past him. Conscience is armed against surprises. He thinks he is

a Christian : in the same degree is he further from becoming one. A man who knows that Christ is not yet his Saviour may one day fall at His feet : when the great waves of this troublesome world beat upon him, he may yet cry out, *O lead me to the rock that is higher than I*¹ : but a nominal Christian, most of all a self-satisfied man, must go on as he is ; what he is not, he will not be ; for better or worse, his line is taken, and for him change is not.

4. Thus we speak, echoing one part at least of the inspired declaration. But Christ allows no man to say that he is forbidden to hope for change. Even the self-complacent self-deluding Christian is counselled to come and buy of Christ. Even he is told that it is because Christ loves him that He rebukes. Even to him the promise is specially addressed, *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*

My brethren, we have great cause to thank and to bless Jesus Christ for the tone in which He speaks to us. We do need gentleness. Sinners are much to be pitied, though they are much to be blamed. If the threatenings of judgment, if the *going away into everlasting punishment*², if the figures of *the undying worm* and *the unquenched fire*³, mean anything, or are not wholly delusive ; then indeed a merciful Saviour, and one who has learned of Him, may well look with

¹ Psalm lxi. 2.

² Matt. xxv. 46.

³ Mark ix. 44.

deep compassion upon souls running headlong into that destruction. *The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle toward all men, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, being taken captive by him, the servant of the Lord, at His (God's) will*¹. To speak angrily to them would be of no avail: they are proof against such sounds: it is but stopping the ear a little more closely, and they can escape from the molestation. But how different ought it to be, how different has it again and again been found in fact, when the words of Christ are such as these to them, *Behold, I stand at thy door, and knock!* The thought of a Divine Person, our Lord and our God, knocking for admittance; coming to us divested of His terrors, and pleading with us as a suppliant; to be told that this is the meaning of everything which befalls us, this the object of every pang of remorse, of every chastisement for sin, of every disappointment of a heart's wish, of every dispensation of an afflicting Providence, of every pain and sorrow, of every sickness and care, of every loss and woe, that Christ may make His knock heard; that the revelry within, with its clamours and its intoxications, may for a moment be interrupted, so that the owner of the mansion may hear at last that calm patient ceaseless sound, and bestir himself to let the stranger in; to be assured that in that simple act of admission lies, even for the most guilty, life and salvation; to be

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25, 26.

taught that that to which we are called is a feast, a feast which Christ will furnish, and at which He will be Himself both guest and host; these things are not words of weakness, they are words of strength; they are *mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds*¹, to the levelling of human pride and the softening of human obduracy.

May it be so, my brethren, with us! I know that I address some to-night who have been very obstinate in disregarding Christ's knock. In their hearts they feel that the word is true; but they have other guests within, whose company they will not part with; sinful habits, sinful tempers, sinful lusts, which must go if Christ enters, and which they do not choose to dismiss; or else they are too indolent to rise and open to Him, too idle and too procrastinating to step across the threshold even for salvation; and thus, whatever the particular cause, the result is the same; life is hurrying on, and they *are not saved*²; the twelve hours of their day are steadily advancing to eventide, and soon *the night cometh, when no man can work*³. Earnestly, anxiously, affectionately, in the name of Christ, for the sake of their own souls—would we plead with these yet once more to-night, that they neglect not so great and so full salvation. Christ stands at the door of your heart, and knocks. O let him that hath an ear hear while it is day, and open!

¹ 2 Cor. x. 4.² Jer. viii. 20.³ John ix. 4.

LECTURE IX. }

REVELATION IV. 1.

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven.

FOR most Christians the Revelation of St John consists of five chapters, and three or four intermediate paragraphs. The three opening chapters, containing the Epistles to the seven churches, with their preface, and the last two chapters, containing the description of the heavenly state, with a few fragments from the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 14th chapters, are practically for us the whole of that Book, of which the first chapter says, *Blessed is he that readeth*¹, and the last chapter, *If any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life*².

I have hoped, my brethren, to do something, if it be but little, on this and several future occasions, to assist you in studying the Revelation of St John. I believe

¹ Rev. i. 3.

² Rev. xxii. 19.

that, if we only read it together, carefully attending to its words, and just gathering up any fragments of its solemn teaching, it would be well, it would be better than nothing, it would not be to be despised. We should at least ascertain in this way, as we can ascertain in no other way, how much of the Book really is unintelligible, or too mysterious for a common Christian's use. Many of us have never done even this: and I doubt whether that is quite a reverent treatment of any part of God's Holy Word.

One thing must be understood at the outset; that where we doubt we must say so, and where we are in the dark we must say so. We are not to go to this commentator and that, and frame some temporary expedient for slurring over a difficulty. Anything rather than that. The book had better be reverently closed than irreverently handled. And it is an irreverent handling if, to save ourselves the discomfort of doubt or the discredit of ignorance, we put upon the utterance of wisdom an interpretation of folly, or trust to escape from the self-imposed conflict in a cloud of ambiguous words or conjectural thoughts. If any one, an interpreter should be candid: if anywhere, at least in the study of God's Word we should constantly and ingenuously speak the truth.

I do not despair of a real blessing being vouchsafed to this endeavour. I am sure that it will interest us. I am sure that it will attract us to God's Word, even in its less audibly vocal parts. I am sure that it will assist us in that eminently important work of fixing the boundaries between our knowledge and our ignorance, and thus

(for must not this ever be the result?) of growing perceptibly in that true wisdom which is true humility. I need not ask every heart in this congregation to offer a special prayer to God that this may be so.

I will remark at the very outset, that the section of this Divine Book on which we enter to-night extends from the first verse of the 4th chapter to the first verse of the 8th chapter, both inclusive.

You will bear in mind that the Church of Christ upon earth at the time when this Book was written was in a state of heavy depression, of great discouragement. St John himself was in exile *for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus*¹. The Epistles to the seven churches tell a tale by no means cheering. We read of martyrdoms in some of them². We read of an *hour of temptation* coming upon the whole then known world, *to try them that dwell on the earth*³. We read too, far worse, of *iniquity abounding* and *love waxing cold*⁴, of feeble strength and prevailing lukewarmness, even in the bosom of the Church itself.

Now it is in the midst of these anxieties and of these distresses that the vision on which we are about to enter is disclosed.

*After*⁵ *these things*, after the first vision, its disclosures and directions, *I saw, and behold, a door set open in the heaven*. We shall have occasion perpetually to refer to passages of the Old Testament for illustrations of expressions used in this Book. Now this first verse, we shall

¹ Rev. i. 9.

² Rev. ii. 13.

³ Rev. iii. 10.

⁴ Matt. xxiv. 12.

⁵ Verse 1.

find, has its parallel in the opening of the prophecies of Ezekiel. *It came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar*¹—you see how distress and sorrow and solitude favour communications between a man and his God; you see it in St John, and here you see it also in Ezekiel—that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. That is the meaning of the *door opened in heaven*. It is in order to let the eye of the seer pass freely in.

And, behold, there was the first voice, which I heard as if of a trumpet talking with me. The first voice is the voice which St John had heard in the vision of the first chapter. *I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega*², &c. Now he says that he heard again this *first voice*, the voice of the first vision, the voice as of a trumpet talking with him. Behold, there was in my ear the same first voice over again, *saying*. There is a peculiarity here: it is *even one saying*, a person saying to me: and we cannot doubt who the person is, when we remember that the same voice, heard in the first chapter, said, *I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last*³. It is then *a person saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must come to pass after these. Must*, because it is the will of God; *must*, because they are written in His book which is now about to be unrolled.

¹ Ezek. i. 1.² Rev. i. 10.³ Rev. i. 11.

*Immediately*¹ *I became in spirit.* The same expression has just been quoted from the first chapter, *I was in spirit on the Lord's day*². I passed into a state in which the spirit, the soul possessed and pervaded by the Holy Spirit, was for me the only existence. The whole mind and soul were raised out of the region of earth and earthly things, and filled, occupied, absorbed, engrossed, by the contemplation of heavenly revelations.

And behold, a throne was set, already set, in the heaven, and upon the throne there was One seated, already seated. The description is that of a council in the very act of being held. It is not to be taken as a description of the ordinary heavenly state: it is the account of an assembly or council gathered together for a special purpose. Thus we shall compare it with the vision of the prophet Micahiah in the last chapter of the first Book of Kings. *I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left*³: and then follows an account of the particular subject of the heavenly council; the fate of the wicked king Ahab, and his approaching fall at Ramoth-gilead. It is so here. The whole scene is introductory to a vision of judgment which will unfold itself hereafter.

*And*⁴ *He that was seated on the throne was like in sight to a precious stone, jasper and sardian.* We read in the 21st chapter of *a jasper stone clear as crystal*⁵: that is the emblem here used to express by its perfect and sparkling whiteness the unsullied purity

¹ Verse 2.² Rev. i. 10.³ 1 Kings xxii. 19.⁴ Verse 3.⁵ Rev. xxi. 11.

and holiness of God. The sardian, or cornelian, on the other hand, by its fiery red colour indicates God's righteous judgment. *And a rainbow was round the throne, like in sight to an emerald.* We all remember the special significance of the rainbow, as recorded in the 9th chapter of the book of Genesis. It is the emblem of faithfulness; faithfulness even amidst judgment. *It shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember my covenant...I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant*¹. More especially is it the emblem of returning mercy; of hope reviving after the deluge; of a faithful care exercised over the little flock of Christ when it is wellnigh submerged and lost in the tempest of human strife or of divine judgment. Such were the tokens exhibited on the very face of the vision to cheer the drooping hopes of the Church of Christ on earth.

*And*² *round the throne were thrones twenty and four; and upon the thrones, the twenty and four, I saw elders seated, clad in white garments, and upon their heads crowns of gold.* These are the representatives of God's Church. We need not be curious about the exact number by which the vision typifies them. It may have been suggested by the combination of the representatives of the two Dispensations, the twelve Patriarchs and the twelve Apostles. Or it may have been with reference to what we read in the 1st Book of Chronicles

¹ Gen. ix. 12—16.

² Verse 4.

of the four and twenty chief men of the house of Aaron, among whom David distributed the various offices of the priesthood¹. We shall hear the four and twenty elders describing themselves as priests as well as kings²: and the white raiment, and even the *holy crown of pure gold*, with its well-known inscription *Holiness to the Lord*, is described in the book of Exodus as the peculiar possession of the Levitical priest³. The four and twenty elders here are representatives of all those whom Christ has redeemed by His blood, and has made priests as well as kings to God.

And⁴ out of the throne go forth lightnings and voices and thunders; indications of approaching judgment; just as we read in the book of Exodus, amongst the preparations for the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, *It came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled: and then Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God⁵*.

And there were seven torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God: the Holy Spirit of God regarded in his operations, in His diffusion, as we noticed at the opening of the 3rd chapter: just as St Paul says, in his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit⁶*.

¹ 1 Chron. xxiv. 1—19.

² Rev. v. 10.

³ Exod. xxxix. 30.

⁴ Verse 5.

⁵ Exod. xix. 16,

⁶ 1 Cor. xii. 4.

*And*¹ *before the throne* there was *as it were a sea of glass, like crystal*; that is, a sea calm and clear as if it had been of transparent glass, or rather—for glass in those days was wanting in perfect transparency—like the clear and bright crystal. The position of this sea in the vision may have been suggested by that of the *molten sea* in front of the temple of Solomon²; but its significance is far greater; it denotes the depth and vastness of God's works and ways. *Thy judgments are like the great deep*³. *Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known*⁴. The sea is the emblem of God's counsels, in their unsearchable depth, their measureless expanse, their freedom, their purity, and their strength.

There is yet another remarkable feature to be added to the picture. *And in the midst of the throne*—or, as I rather believe, according to a well-known idiom of the original language, *between it and the throne*, in the interval between the sea and the throne itself—and *around the throne* were *four living creatures full of eyes before and behind*. As the four and twenty elders are the representatives of the Church, so the four living beings are representatives of creation. The number *four* is characteristic of the earth, with its four quarters, four corners, and four winds. The figure, originally taken from the cherubim in the tabernacle—*over the ark the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat*⁵—was ap-

¹ Verse 6.

² 2 Chron. iv. 9, 10.

³ Psalm xxxvi. 6 (Prayer-Book Version).

⁴ Psalm lxxvii. 19.

⁵ Heb. ix. 5.

plied in the visions of the prophet Ezekiel¹, in a manner from which the description before us is transferred.

And² the first living creature was like a lion; and the second living creature like a calf, or rather, a young ox; and the third living creature having its countenance as of a human being; and the fourth living creature like an eagle flying. It lies on the surface to observe here specimens of different classes of creation; wild beasts and tame, birds of the air, and that rational being to whom others are subjected. I know not whether we may not see also in the description of these living beings which are brought so near the throne of God to utter His praise, something also of a combination of those qualities which in their distinctness and separation mark each one of these races. When we add together the generous boldness of the lion, the enduring industry of the ox, the soaring aspiration of the eagle, and the tender touching sympathy of the man, have we not in one whole that character which is most fit to take up its abode in God's presence, and with ceaseless praise to declare his glory?

And³ the four living creatures, one by one of them having six wings apiece, around and within are full of eyes: it is a very strong expression; properly teem with eyes; the emblem, I suppose, of ceaseless vigilance and strong vitality: and rest they have not, by day and by night, saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord (Jehovah) God;

¹ Ezek. i. 5. x. 1—22.

² Verse 7.

³ Verse 8.

the Almighty, who was and who is and who cometh. The first words of this hymn of praise are found in the corresponding vision of the Prophet Isaiah. *I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims—* answering to the *living creatures* of which we have read in Ezekiel and here—*each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory*¹. Of the concluding words of the verse immediately before us we have heard already in the 1st chapter². And they are in fact identical with that revelation of God which was made to Israel on the occasion of which we read in the first lesson for this morning, when, in answer to the enquiry of Moses as to the name by which he was to speak to them of their Deliverer, *God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*³. *He who was and who is and who cometh* is He who has neither beginning of days nor end of life⁴; He who knows neither origination nor circumscription of being; He who is the same, the unchangeable God, in the remotest past, in the moment that is, and to the remotest future.

*And*⁵ *whenever the living creatures shall give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sitteth upon the*

¹ Isai. vi. 1—3.

² Rev. i. 8.

³ Exod. iii. 14.

⁴ Heb. vii. 3.

⁵ Verse 9.

throne, who liveth to the ages of the ages, to an eternity which comprehends not units of years only, but ages of which each unit is an age, the¹ twenty and four elders will (are wont to) fall down before Him that sitteth upon the throne, and worship Him that liveth unto the ages of the ages, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy² art Thou, the Lord (Jehovah) and our God, to have received the glory and the honour and the power, because Thou didst create all things, and through (owing to) Thy will they were, and were created.

We have reached but the very opening of the vision: we have not yet reached the subject of the council: we have not yet completed the scenery of the presence-chamber itself. But the time forbids our proceeding to-night beyond the limits of this one chapter. Let us endeavour to collect from it a few of its chief lessons before we conclude.

1. The first of these must be, the reality of a heavenly world, and of its concern and connection with this. As soon as ever a door is opened in heaven, the prophet hears voices and sees forms above, of which a moment before he was utterly unconscious. Surely it is well that we should be reminded that the world of sight and sense is but a small fraction of God's universe. There is another world in full existence and in full operation beside and above this. That other world has its inhabitants. That other world

¹ Verse 10.

² Verse 11.

has its plans and its purposes, its presences and its agencies, even like this. That other world, though distinct from, is closely connected with this; and the subjects of its chief deliberations are the interests and the fortunes, the events and the destinies, of this lower world which is the home of those whom we call the living.

2. What an astonishment would it be to any one of us, my brethren, to see that door into heaven suddenly opened! We may suppose that something of this kind actually happens at the completion of that change which we denominate death. O what a marvel, what a confusion, what a discomfiture, must it be to a worldly man or to a sinner to find at the moment of death that this thing which we have so long seen and handled, in which we have so long lived and moved, was not, after all, the whole or the chief part of that which is! It can need little more than this flash of surprise—very little of examinations of witnesses, or of confessions of the accused, or of sentences of judges—to tell them how utterly unequipped they are for a world so different! If the assurance, *We shall see Him as He is*¹, is a sufficient argument for the blessed transformation of the righteous at the hour of Christ's coming, then surely the prediction, *They shall see it as it is*, will be a sufficient statement of the misery of entering unrepentant, unforgiven, unbelieving, into the world of spirit, of reality, of heaven.

¹ 1 John iii. 2.

3. But the revelation of a world co-existent with our own, though separated from its view at present as by a solid and closed door in heaven, was not designed in the passage before us to be so much a terror as an encouragement. To Christian persons, to those, that is, who mourn for sin, and renounce and forsake it, and trust in Christ only, and pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit to make them and keep them His, it ought to be and will be a real comfort to remember that just inside that door there is a heaven, and a throne set, and a God seated thereon, and a holy and loving council gathered, and plans under preparation for purposes of good to the poor struggling and suffering people below; and that round the throne is the covenant bow, promising evermore a *clear shining after rain*¹, and pledging the very faithfulness of God to their final rescue and deliverance. There have been times repeatedly in the Church, and there are times repeatedly in every separate human life, at which all things seem to be against success², against the power to endure, against the hope of perseverance and of escape. How good is it, at such times, to turn to a scene like that here disclosed! to be reminded of something exactly opposite to chance and change, something which bespeaks purpose, something which tells of a clue threading the labyrinth, and of a plummet sounding the depths! He who *commits the keeping of his soul* into God's hands, *as into the hands of a faithful Creator*³, through His Son Jesus Christ, is

¹ 2 Sam. .xxiii. 4.² Gen. xlii. 36.³ 1 Pet. iv. 19.

being cared for and thought for and planned for inside that door, as certainly as if it were for him already opened, and he heard *the first voice* saying, *Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.*

4. St Peter says, in words just referred to, *as into the hands of a faithful Creator.* He goes back, for the redeemed, to a claim and a tie yet earlier than redemption. He teaches them to feel that, when sin is put away, when there is peace between the soul and God by a method not of nature, and not of creation, but of subsequent spontaneous grace; then the plea of creation resumes its original power, and that he who can say, *I am Thine in Christ*, may go on to say, *Forsake not the work of Thine own hands*¹. Even such is the note here struck. Is not that the very meaning of the four living beings, representatives (as we have seen) of all parts and sections of creation? Was not that description written for the very purpose of reminding us that God in Christ has all power in earth as well as in heaven; that in the strictest sense, *all things serve Him*²? Life and death, things present as well as things to come, accident and disease, want and age; yes, things more outward still, the bread and the water, the fire and the covering, the judgments of sword and famine and pestilence³, the mercies of dew and rain and fruitful seasons⁴; all are God's, all are Christ's; and if God's, if Christ's, then the Christian's too. *All things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ*

¹ Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

² Psalm cxix. 91 (Prayer-Book Version).

³ Ezek. xiv. 21.

⁴ Acts xiv. 17.

is God's¹. O what an antidote to life's cares, for those who can use it! It springs from the fact that creation itself, in all its parts, rational and irrational, has its representatives before the throne in heaven, and ascribes the glory, the honour, and the strength, to Him who sits upon the throne, who liveth for ever and ever!

5. But if the thought of the four living beings which typify creation has something of comfort for us in reference to the world above, how much more that of men of our own flesh and likeness, who are already clad in the robes of priesthood, and admitted to the sight of God and to the ministrations of the heavenly temple! *That world*² is not all peopled with strange and unknown forms. Men are there; patriarchs, prophets, apostles; saints and martyrs; common men too, poor men, humble men, men whom we have known, men whom we have loved, familiar forms, friends and guides, young and old, now *made perfect through sufferings*³: they are there; and one part, no doubt, of their employment is adoration; they fall down before Him that sits on the throne, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord*: but this is not all; it is no fancied lesson which bids us read in this chapter a proof of their care also and interest in us; of their being as it were members of a heavenly council of which the subject is earth, earth and its fortunes, the church in its struggle with the world, the soul of the Christian combatant in its battle with the powers of evil. Surely, in this sense

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

² Luke xx. 35.

³ Heb. ii. 10.

at least, the elders here described are representatives of us. *We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses*, as we *run the race set before us*¹; and those witnesses are not mere spectators; they are members too of the heavenly council, and we, we ourselves, we here below, are the subject and concern of their consultations.

6. The closing word is obvious; Are we Christians indeed? Are our faces and our feet set heavenwards? Are we running with patience the race set before us? Are our desires after holiness, our aspirations after the life of Christ? O, if not, the thought of a throne in heaven, and yet more of a council in heaven, of a plan in heaven, a plan which has for its end the discomfiture of evil and the safety of the Christian, can be only indifferent to you, or else alarming. And whether you will have it so or not, it is true. God has a purpose, and through favouring and adverse circumstances He is surely guiding it to its end. O be with Him and not against Him in it! O submit yourselves, while you may, to Christ, and so shall you *not be ashamed before Him at His coming*².

¹ Heb. xii. 1.

² 1 John ii. 28.

LECTURE X.

REVELATION V. 6.

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb, as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

THE 4th chapter presented to us the spectacle of a council gathered in heaven. There was a throne set, and One seated upon it, who is God Himself. The throne itself is encircled with its rainbow, the emblem of divine faithfulness, and more particularly of divine mercy emerging out of a scene of judgment. Around the throne are four and twenty thrones, occupied by so many elders in the dress of a royal priesthood. From the throne go forth ceaseless lightnings and thunderings and voices; indications, like those on Sinai¹, of a coming ministry of judgment. Before the throne is a sea of glass; the image of God's counsels, in their depth, their

¹ Exod. xix. 16.

vastness, their purity, and their strength. Between the sea of glass and the throne itself are four living creatures, each representing a whole class of animated being, and each typifying, it may be, a component quality—courage, industry, aspiration, sympathy—of that perfection of character which shall approach nearest to the throne of God. The chapter closes with the adorations of the two classes thus far introduced; the adorations of the four living creatures, and the adorations of the four and twenty elders, to the holy, almighty, and eternal God, from whose undisputed will creation itself has derived its being.

Thus everything is prepared for further disclosure: but the Christian's heart misses thus far one element of comfort and hope. Let us see whether the chapter on which we enter to-night will supply this want.

And¹ I saw on the right hand, lying on the open palm, of Him that sat on the throne a book, that is, a paper roll, written within and behind; so full of matter that the back of the roll was not, as usual, left blank, but the writing was seen to overflow, as it were, upon it.

We shall be reminded here of what is said of the tables of the law as originally committed to Moses, that *they were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written²*; and still more exactly of the prophetic roll described in the opening of the prophecies of Ezekiel; *And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein: and He spread it before me; and it was written within and*

¹ Verse 1.

² Exod. xxxii. 15.

*without; and there was written therein lamentations and mourning and woe*¹.

It is further said of the roll seen in this vision, that it was *fast sealed with seven seals*. It is of little consequence to settle the position of these seals; in what manner they were seen to secure that document, the contents of which had been already observed to extend even to its outer side. The only important point is to notice the prophetic significance of a sealed roll. And we shall find an exact parallel in one of the prophecies of Isaiah. *And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book (roll) that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed*². The sealing was something which precluded the reading. Even learning was of no avail until the seal was removed. Thus the roll of God's counsels, here lying upon the open hand of Him that sat on the throne, could have no message for His servants, so long as the seals or any of the seals remained. So long the mystery of God was not a secret told, but a secret kept.

*And*³ *I saw a mighty angel, proclaiming in a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the roll, and to loose the seals of it? And*⁴ *no one was able, in the heaven, nor on the earth, nor under the earth—no created power, neither angel nor man; nor, of men, either the living or the dead—to open the roll, no, nor to look upon it. And*⁵ *I wept much, in the disappointment of excited expectation, because no*

¹ Ezek. ii. 9, 10.

² Isai. xxix. 11.

³ Verse 2.

⁴ Verse 3.

⁵ Verse 4.

one was found worthy to open the roll, nor to look upon it. I saw that it was full of God's counsels and of God's purposes; I knew that those counsels and those purposes concerned His Church on earth; I saw that Church oppressed and persecuted, slowly making way, and easily driven backward; I felt that explanation was all that was needed to make God's dealings with it consistent and even welcome: and yet here, at the very moment when that explanation seemed to be vouchsafed, there was no mediating voice to read it from the language of God into the language of men, or to make the dead, the sealed, the silent page an open revelation and a living voice. *And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the roll.* O my brethren, the tears of the Apostle may seem to us exaggerated and unreal. We cannot enter into that agony of expectation, into the anguish of that hope deferred, out of which those tears flowed. Alas! even the open book, the book read to us by a Saviour, the book which tells us of the mind of God and of all His purposes concerning us, gives us no comfort, awakens in us no desire, meets in us too often with no response. How do the tears of St John reprove us! What a depth of unthankfulness on our part, what a dulness of spiritual apprehension and of spiritual interest, do they reveal by contrast! Well has it been written, *The words, I wept much, can only be understood by those who have lived in great catastrophes of the Church, and entered with the fullest sympathy into her sufferings... Without tears the Revelation was not written, neither can it without tears be understood.*

And¹ one from among the elders saith to me, Weep not: behold, One conquered, even the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, who openeth—that is, conquered so as to open—the roll and the seven seals of it. Conquered so as to open. The glory of opening the book of God's counsels is the result of Christ's victory in redemption. It is one part of the *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him*², of which we heard this morning in the Epistle for the day. To be the unfolders, the revealers, the expositors, of God's counsels to God's Church and God's creatures, is one part of that mediatorial reign upon which the Saviour entered through sufferings.

The Lion of the tribe of Judah. It is evident, we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, *that our Lord sprang out of Judah*³. And in the prophetic blessing of the sons of Jacob, the lion is made, as you remember, the emblem of that particular tribe. *Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up*⁴? Strength and courage, a prowess noble and generous, are the ideas conveyed by the figure.

The root of David, an expression occurring again in the last chapter of this Book, *I am the root and offspring of David*⁵, is derived from the language of the 11th chapter of the Prophet Isaiah, *the root of Jesse*⁶; meaning a product of the root, just as *seed* is so commonly used for that which springs from it. *The root of David* is He who according to God's promise sprang in the fulness

¹ Verse 5.² Phil. ii. 9.³ Heb. vii. 14.⁴ Gen. xlix. 9.⁵ Rev. xxii. 16.⁶ Isai. xi. 1.

of time from the royal stock of David. *How say the Scribes, and say truly, that Christ is the Son of David¹? Hath not the Scripture said, that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem where David was²?*

He then it is; He of the predicted tribe, from which *Shiloh should come³*; He of the predicted house, to which it was promised that God would *not fail David⁴*; He it is, who by His victory over death and the grave for man has secured to Himself the glory of opening to man the book of God's counsels.

And⁵ I saw in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, occupying, that is, the central spot in the panorama, a Lamb standing—the original expression is yet more remarkable; the word is the diminutive form, *a little Lamb*, as though to enhance still further the tenderness and the pathos of the image—*as if having been slain*; alive, not dead; standing, not prostrate; and yet bearing marks as of recent slaughter. How exactly is this the description of Him whom the Lamb typifies, when, returning to His disciples after His resurrection in the fulness of a resumed life, He was yet able to show them the nail-prints in His feet and hands, and the mark of the spear-wound in His side⁶! *There stood a Lamb as it had been slain. I am He that liveth, and was dead⁷.*

The elder had pointed to a lion, the lion of the tribe

¹ Mark xii. 35.

² John vii. 42.

³ Gen. xlix. 10.

⁴ Psalm lxxxix. 34 (Prayer-Book Version).

⁵ Verse 6.

⁶ John xx. 25—27.

⁷ Rev. i. 18.

of Judah: the prophet, when he looks, beholds a lamb. It is indeed a true parable. Strength and gentleness, courage and patience, victory and suffering, might and innocence, *meet together and kiss each other*¹ in Christ. But whence this last emblem? Where first do we read of Christ under the type of the Lamb? St John in the 1st chapter of His Gospel records the memorable testimony of the Baptist, who, *seeing on a certain day Jesus coming unto Him, said of Him, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*²! And lest there should remain any doubt as to the allusion involved in that saying, the same Evangelist quotes as fulfilled in the circumstances of the crucifixion of Jesus that which was enjoined with reference to the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb in the book of Exodus, *A bone of him shall not be broken*³. Yes, my brethren, it is not only or chiefly of the innocence of Jesus, that these things are written in Scripture. When He is spoken of as the Lamb of God, it is far more as our great Sacrifice. *Christ our Passover*, our Paschal sacrifice, *is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast*⁴. *Redeemed not with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot*⁵. And thus is fulfilled that which was written of old in the great Gospel prophecy of Isaiah, *He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter... The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all...Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin...He bare the sin of*

¹ Psalm lxxxv. 10. ² Jphn i. 29. ³ Exod. xii. 46. John xix. 36.

⁴ 1 Cor. v. 7, 8. ⁵ 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

*many, and made intercession for the transgressors*¹. These are the reasons why Passion week, why Palm Sunday and Good Friday, ought to be a holy season to us; because every one of us is concerned in that sacrifice, not only as a beautiful exhibition of benevolence or of patience, but as that one transaction on which every hope of man is suspended, by which, if at all, our iniquity is forgiven and our sin purged². Henceforth throughout this book we shall find this figure entirely consecrated to this one sacred use. *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain*³. *They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*⁴. *They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb*⁵. *These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth*⁶. *The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*⁷.

Having seven horns. The horn in Scripture is the symbol of strength. It is said of the tribe of Joseph in the blessing of Moses, *His horns are like the horns of unicorns; with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth*⁸. And so in the 132nd Psalm, to take a single example out of many, *There will I make the horn of David to bud*⁹. The horn is the strength. *Mine horn is exalted in the Lord... He shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His Anointed*¹⁰. *My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name*

¹ Isai. liii. 6, 7, 10, 12.² Isai. vi. 7.³ Rev. v. 12.⁴ Rev. vii. 14.⁵ Rev. xii. 11.⁶ Rev. xiv. 4.⁷ Rev. xxi. 23.⁸ Deut. xxxiii. 17.⁹ Psalm cxxxii. 17.¹⁰ 1 Sam. ii. 1, 10.

*shall his horn be exalted*¹. The horn is the strength : the seven horns denote the fulness of strength.

It is further said, *And seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth*, or more exactly, *in process of being sent forth, into all the earth*. The seven eyes, the symbol at once of omniscience and of life, of universal presence and of vigorous vitality, are *the seven Spirits of God*; the one Holy Spirit of God in His sevenfold gifts of grace; that Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Son as of the Father; even as our Lord said on earth, *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me*². Of this Holy Spirit it is here said, that His manifold operations are *sent forth into all the earth*, and that still, wherever manifested, they are the workings of One who is the Spirit of Christ the Lord of the Church.

I have thought, my brethren, that there is enough in the few verses now read to you to furnish us with just that instruction which is most suitable to the solemn commemoration, on which we this day enter, of the circumstances of the Passion and Death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

1. And first, as to the position which our Lord occupies in the Church in heaven. His is there the central figure; and He is there as the Lamb that was slain. He is there with the tokens of His sacrifice clear and fresh upon Him. O, my brethren, while men are

¹ Psalm lxxxix. 24.

² John xv. 26.

discussing below what Christ is and is not ; while they are weighing and measuring, too often modifying and paring down, the words of Scripture with reference to the pre-existence or the omniscience or the Divinity of Christ ; lift your eyes above, and see for yourselves what your Saviour is in heaven ! See where He stands ; in the very midst of the throne and of the elders ; worshipped even where God is enthroned ; and still in this one character, as the Lamb that once was slain ! I think we cannot be mistaken in throwing upon this one fact the whole weight of our hope and our trust. We shall not be too curious in investigating, where the Word of God does not guide us, the mode and method of Propitiation and Atonement : but we shall see in this one exhibition of the attitude and the character which the Saviour bears in heaven, a proof, worth ten thousand reasonings, of what He is in Himself, and of what He is to us. I am not afraid of our resting too much upon the Atonement : I am far more afraid of our disparaging and forgetting it. No man was ever made to sin by believing that Christ was *made sin*¹ for him. Men may make an excuse for their sins out of anything ; free grace may be made an excuse, and so may inexorable justice be made an excuse ; universal redemption may be made an excuse, and limited redemption may be made an excuse for sin : but I say again, a deep and hearty trust in *the blood of Christ cleansing from all sin*² never yet had any effect, so far as it was deep and

¹ 2 Cor. v. 21.

² 1 John i. 7.

genuine, but that of making a man sorry for his sin, and ashamed of his sin, and desirous to rise out of it to walk in newness of life. *There is mercy with Thee*: what then? that Thou mayest be trifled with, sinned against, trodden underfoot? No, *that Thou mayest be feared: therefore shalt Thou be feared*¹. O let this season not pass by us unused ! O let some who have of late too much resigned themselves to the power of evil habit, look this week upon the Lamb that was slain, and arise to renew their warfare ! O let some who have been perplexing themselves about things which are too high for them, some who have been tampering with the sophistries of unbelief, and scanning with a cold eye and a presumptuous intellect their Saviour's place in the economy of God, look up yet once again towards heaven, and by faith behold Him *standing on the right hand of God*²: see Him occupying the central spot in the assembled company of heaven ; and bow their own heads, together *with angels and archangels*, with representatives of creation and representatives of the Church of every age, before the one exalted form of *the Lamb for sinners slain* ! And O, if there be others, as assuredly there are, in this congregation, whose bane is not so much one definite *root of bitterness*³ troubling and defiling them, but rather that blight of worldliness, that irresistible though most insidious power of the things that are seen, eating away all spirituality of mind, all faith in things above, and leaving only the shell and husk of a man, a being with-

¹ Psalm cxxx. 4.² Acts vii. 56.³ Heb. xii. 15.

out soul, without aspiration, without a heaven or a God; let these too utter, before they go hence, that earnest, that availing cry of a spirit *tied and bound with its sin* to the God who cares for us and can save; let them arise and look upon the form of the Lamb that was slain, and carry forth with them into to-morrow's battlefield that sign of the cross in which alone man conquers!

2. And along with this thought of the *Lamb as it had been slain*, carry with you also that of the *Divine Spirit sent forth into all the earth*. Is not this our justification for the work of missions? Is not this our one practical hope for our own souls?

How slow we all are to believe in that which we see not! Even more timid than our trust in a Divine Mediator is our trust in a Divine Spirit. And yet, my brethren, I know of no comfort for sinners but in those two things, in that twofold yet most harmonious faith. What should we be without a Divine Saviour? What should we be without a Divine Spirit? And O what should we be but for the reconciling and harmonizing knowledge that the Divine Spirit is the very eye of the Divine Saviour; the penetrating and pervading and vivifying ray which goes forth, not from some unknown source, but from that central Sun, for the comforting and *the healing of the nations*¹?

Yes, my friends, God has not left us to *work out our own salvation*² without help. His Spirit is abroad amongst us; yea, sent forth already into all the earth.

¹ Rev. xxii. 2.

² Phil. ii. 12.

Wherever there is a gentle thought, wherever there is a holy desire, wherever there is a kind and dutiful and Christian feeling, it is of Him. And wherever there is such a sight seen as a sinner *arising and returning to his Father*¹; and wherever there is a poor wounded spirit pouring itself out before a long forgotten, yet now at last remembered God; and wherever there is a Minister interceding with God for his people, and laying out his life in their service; and wherever there is a congregation listening with all their heart to the message delivered to them on this holy evening from the throne of God in heaven; there is the Holy Spirit at work: there is one of the eyes of the Lamb bent upon man from its central standing-place above; bent upon him not with searching force only, but also with quickening life and with transforming and irradiating love. And wherever in some distant land a lonely messenger is plying his weary way through discouragement and disappointment; remembering sadly, this Sunday evening, the congregations far away in his own native country, amidst which he once went up to worship, and sighing in his estrangement for but one of those companions in *going to the house of God*², who might have cheered his solitude and lightened his depression; but still turning back again and yet again to his Bible as his light and his stay; still pondering the glorious prophecies which tell of *the Lord's house* being hereafter *established on the top of the mountains* and of *all nations flowing to it*³; or still resting, with a yet

¹ Luke xv. 18.² Psalm xlii. 4.³ Isai. ii. 2. Mic. iv. 1.

more fond tenderness, on the thrice-told tale of Gethsemane and Calvary, and learning there a meekness of endurance and a patience of hope and a strength of love not elsewhere to be gathered; and then going forth once more to his wearisome and often thankless labour in calling to hearts that will not understand, and to *souls that will not be redeemed*; wherever these things are, there also are *the seven Spirits of God* operating in the earth: these things come not out of the barren ground; these things are no product of the natural fallen sinful heart; they are all of God: and He who does one thing that is above man can do all things that are above man at His pleasure; these things are an earnest and a foretaste of things greater and more glorious still; they not only bid us labour on and not faint, but they also open to us a glimpse of that further and furthest future, the faintest gleam of which outshines and eclipses the brightest and the fairest of earth's fleeting visions.

These things are our hope. We see a power working which is not man's, nor on man's scale or level. We see here and there—not everywhere, not where we will, but where God wills—a something, we know not how to designate it, which testifies the omnipotence of the grace of God. Mixed at present with much that is most opposite to it; overborne oftentimes, and almost lost in the intermixture; coexisting, it may be, in the same house and in the same chamber, with that which is altogether *earthly* and sinful, *sensual* and *devilish*¹. But there it is. It has its own character, which

¹ James iii. 15.

we cannot misread: it has its own promise, which the world itself can scarcely gainsay. It says to us, God is, and Christ is, and the Holy Ghost is; and that which is shall one day be made manifest: *there is nothing covered, for good or for evil, that shall not be revealed*¹. It says, When you lay your schemes on the supposition that nothing is real but that which is visible, beware, beware! there is something else, and one day your eyes will be blinded with the excess of that light against the mild radiance of which on earth you closed them. It says, O help, and hinder not, that work which is all God's; the work of holiness within, the work of evangelization without! See that you be on the right side yourself, and that you assist the right cause in others! The Lamb stands before the throne of God as the one object of adoration; stands there with the mark of slaughter still fresh as when eighteen hundred years ago that slaughter was accomplished; see that He be to you, as to Apostles and martyrs of old, *your Lord and your God*²! The seven Spirits of God are abroad on earth, moving, shining, enlightening, quickening: they work here and there; in this house and in that; in this town and in that; in this land and in that; where Christ is professedly known, and where Christ is a name named but by the few: see that they work in you! see that they be your light, your hope, your strength! see that they be welcomed by you, and not spurned; cherished and fostered, and

¹ Matt. x. 26.² John xx. 28.

not grieved nor quenched ! See that there be no doubt on which side you are in the great battle of the Lord and His enemies ; *rejoicing not in iniquity, but rejoicing with the truth*¹ ; showing forth *the same mind which was in Christ Jesus*, and *living the life which you now live in the flesh by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave Himself for you*² !

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 6. ² 1 Pet. iv. 1. Phil. ii. 5. Gal. ii. 20.

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE EASTER,
March 24, 1861.

LECTURE XI.

REVELATION V. 13.

And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

OUR subject for Palm Sunday completed the scenery of the heavenly council-chamber by the introduction of that which is to be henceforth its central figure. *I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain*¹, retaining even in resumed life tokens of a previous slaughter, *having seven horns, emblems of the fulness of strength, and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.* We drew from this description its two most obvious

¹ Rev. v. 6.

lessons; the first as to the position occupied by the Saviour in heaven as the Lamb that was slain, and the second as to the presence in all the earth of that Divine Spirit who is the very eye of Christ; and then we reserved, to be our Easter subject, the reception of the Lamb, His adoration, in the very presence of God Himself, in the three separate doxologies, the utterance of three separate and distinct bodies, which fill the rest of the chapter on which we then entered.

You have not forgotten the introduction of the Lamb to the Prophet's view. There is a scroll lying on the open hand of Him that sits on the throne; a roll of a book, so full of contents that the writing spreads from front to back: it is written within and without; and the writing concerns the Church of God; it will clear much of the mystery of the Divine will; it will show that even the oppression of God's cause on earth has a purpose, and the sufferings of God's people on earth an explanation, and the maze of human life and of the world's life a pervading and guiding clue; it will throw light upon the past, it will cheer the present, it will reveal things to come: but the scroll is fast sealed with seven seals, and no one in heaven or in earth is found worthy to take it into his hand or even to look thereon. It is presently announced that one Person, one alone, has prevailed to do this. The victory gained on the Cross has procured for the Lamb of God this glory, that He be the receiver and the opener, the revealer and the explainer of the counsels of God to man.

*And*¹ *He came, and now He hath received it, the sealed roll, out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne.* He has received the revelation: now shall His people know it, by the inward teaching of that Spirit which is the mind of God, which is the eye of Christ, and which is sent forth in sevenfold agencies into all the earth. Now shall we know. Not yet. The very acceptance of the Mediatorship of truth, the very investiture with the Revealer's office, is hailed by the heavenly hosts with those admiring acclamations which must interrupt for the moment the execution of the work itself.

*And*² *when He received the roll, the four living creatures, representatives of creation, and the twenty four elders, representatives of the Church of every age, fell before the Lamb, having each one, that is, of the elders, a harp, and having golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the holy, of the consecrated, of those who belong to God only.* This verse explains the importance attached in the ceremonial Law to the burning of incense. The book of Exodus contains minute directions for the composition of it; and those directions close with a solemn prohibition of the use of it for any but a sacred purpose. *It shall be unto you most holy...Ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord. Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people*³. The sweet-

¹ Verse 7.

² Verse 8.

³ Exod. xxx. 36, 37, 38.

smelling incense was designed as an emblem of prayer. The 1st chapter of St Luke's Gospel tells us that, while the incense was burning, *the whole multitude of the people were wont to be praying without*¹. And the 141st Psalm makes this very application of the emblem. *Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*². The incense with which, in the passage before us, the bowls are filled for offering before the Lamb, is emblematical of the prayers of God's saints.

The elders in this vision are the representatives of the whole Church. And therefore we shall see nothing here of vicarious prayers; nothing, I mean, of prayers offered, strictly speaking, by the Church in heaven for the Church on earth; of a human mediation, even if it were that of *the spirits of just men made perfect*³, for those who have one Mediator and need none other. The prayers which the elders offer in the vision are representative prayers, not vicarious; their own as representing all, not the prayers of others rendered efficacious by their intercession.

It is an encouraging thought surely, when rightly understood, that the prayers of Christ's servants are the incense which smells sweetly in heaven. The assurance that prayer is not forced upon God, but *His delight*⁴; not a thing which we have to press upon His notice, but that which He looks for in us as our suitable gift; that the application for His help, and the thanksgiving for His

¹ Luke i. 10.

² Psalm cxli. 2.

³ Heb. xii. 23.

⁴ Prov. xv. 8.

goodness, and even the confession of sin and infirmity, is the very thing which He recognizes as suitable to our nature and a tribute to Himself; should assist us in coming with this thing to the throne of grace, that we may contribute to that censer full of sweet odours which is the one acceptable offering before the throne in heaven.

And¹ they sing a new song, inspired by the scene before them, by the sight of the Lamb of God in His new character of the Mediator of God's revelations, saying, Worthy art Thou to receive the roll, and to open the seals of it: because Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God in Thy blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and² didst make them a kingdom and priests, and they reign over, or upon, the earth. This, as we saw last Sunday, is the foundation of every office, and of this amongst others, exercised by Jesus Christ towards His Church on earth. *He humbled Himself, and became obedient, unto death, even the death of the cross: wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name³.* One part of that name, of that character, which is the reward of His humiliation, is that of the Revealer of God's counsels. *Thou art worthy to receive the book, because Thou wast slain.*

And didst purchase for God in Thy blood. The blood, that is, the death, of Christ, was our purchase. *Ye are not your own: ye were bought for a price⁴. Not redeemed with corruptible things, silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ⁵.* My brethren, let us not be afraid of

¹ Verse 9.

² Verse 10.

³ Phil. ii. 8, 9.

⁴ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

⁵ 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

that most true, most just, most scriptural expression. None other can give so briefly or so strongly the truth which is our life. The more man would rob us of it, so much the more let us hold it fast as God's gift.

Thou didst purchase out of, that is, men belonging to, *every tribe and tongue and people and nation*. The redemption of Christ is world-wide. There is nothing local in it. There is no restriction in its intention, and there is no restriction in its application. It is co-extensive with the earth in its design; it is co-extensive with human nature in its efficacy. There is no disposition, no conformation, no peculiarity of temper or understanding, of state or of heart, which *the purchasing blood* cannot reach and meet. And it will be seen that it has reached, that it has met all. It will be seen that, where it has failed to save, it has not been because it was inappropriate, but only because it was unappropriated; because men would not use it, not because it was even for them useless.

Thou didst make them, that is, those who were thus purchased, those who took to themselves the redemption which is for all, *a kingdom and priests*. *A royal priesthood*¹ St Peter calls them. *A kingdom* here is a form of expression nearly similar to *a priesthood* there. It means a race of kings, as the other means a body of priests. We saw, in commenting on the 4th chapter², that both these offices were designated by the attire of the elders; the white robe of priesthood, and then the kingly crown.

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

² Rev. iv. 4.

And they reign, not shall reign, over, or else, but not necessarily, upon, the earth. Already Christ has the dominion, though not yet is every foe visibly subjected to Him: they shall be¹. And they who are Christ's, they who are united to Him by the possession of one Spirit, are whatever He is: if He lives, they live; if He is in heaven, they are in heaven²; if He with whom they are one is reigning over the earth, then are they reigning: *all things are yours...the world, or life or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours, for ye are Christ's*³. But there is a veil over all these things at present, and therefore we are still looking forward to what St Paul describes as the day of *the unveiling of the sons of God*⁴.

What must it have been to St John, and to the poor distressed persecuted Church of his time, to receive such an account of the true position of their Master and of His servants! Whatever the appearance might be, He a King, and they therefore kings too! A cloud between Him and the earth: nothing more: a thin white cloud, only not transparent: and behind it the heavenly presence-chamber; behind it the Lamb that was slain, invested with an almighty dominion; behind it the representatives of the Church ruling in Him over the earth! Well may they wait a while, and suffer a little: assuredly there is a glory which shall outweigh and outshine it all⁵!

Thus we have listened, my brethren, to one doxology; now let us turn to the second.

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 25. Heb. ii. 8.

² Eph. ii. 6.

³ 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22, 23.

⁴ Rom. viii. 19.

⁵ Rom. viii. 18.

And¹ I saw—the usual commencement of a new or partly new disclosure, even though the next word may intimate more of sound than sight—*and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands*—the larger number is put first, with that consciousness of grandeur, and that indifference to formal rules of rhetoric, which well suits the transcendent sublimity of the utterance—*saying² with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive by adoring ascription the power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing!* We shall not stay to examine and scrutinize each expression. The only word which could cause a moment's hesitation, the term *riches*, is already familiar to us all in St Paul's writings, and especially in his Epistle to the Ephesians. *The riches of His grace. The riches of the glory³. The exceeding riches of His grace⁴. The riches of His glory⁵. And yet more precisely, the unsearchable riches of Christ⁶.* It denotes that inexhaustible treasure of perfection, and more especially of goodness and mercy towards men, which is contained and centred in Christ.

This then is the second doxology: and you will have observed that it differs materially from the former. Hitherto our eyes have been fixed on what we have described as the council-chamber itself. The former doxology came from thence. It was the adoration of

¹ Verse 11.² Verse 12.³ Eph. i. 7, 18.⁴ Eph. ii. 7.⁵ Eph. iii. 16.⁶ Eph. iii. 8.

the elders who represent the Church, though seconded as it were by the living beings who represent creation, and who could not look on in idle indifference upon the adoration of their present Lord. But now we are bidden to extend our gaze, and notice what may rather be called the setting and the framework of the council-chamber. Its walls are no work of stiff and solid masonry; on this side and on that, on the north and on the south, on the east and on the west, it is compassed only by infinite space; and that surrounding expanse is peopled by myriads of angels, of those spiritual and un-fallen beings who, instead of triumphing in the sin and shame of man, view his fortunes with tenderest sympathy, *desire to look into*¹ the wonderful counsels of his redemption, and rejoice with an unselfish yet thrilling transport over each several *sinner that repenteth*². They throng on every side the outer courts of the presence-hall; not occupying its seats, because the matter under discussion affects not them directly, but the world and the Church of man; yet forming an assemblage of deeply interested spectators, whose songs of praise mingle now with the adorations of the elders, to say at least, *Worthy the Lamb that was slain*, if they cannot actually say with the redeemed, *the Lamb that was slain for us!* Thus are the words seen as though in the very act and process of their accomplishment, *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God*³.

¹ 1 Pet. i. 12.

² Luke xv. 10.

³ Eph. iii. 10.

And thus, through the adorations of the elders, and the acclamations of angelic hosts around, we pass, in the third and last place, to the words of the text, and the consummation of the whole.

And¹ every creature which is in the heaven and upon the earth and beneath the earth, in the regions, it may be, of the departed, and upon the sea, and the things which are in them, the inhabitants of all these departments and divisions of the universe, even all persons—for it is of rational and intelligent beings that the whole passage speaks—heard I saying, To Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, be the (all) blessing and the honour and the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages, even to the utmost range of that eternity of which the component parts are themselves not years but ages. And² the four living creatures uttered the Amen, and the elders fell and worshipped. And thus the wide and ever-widening circle of adoration has been compacted once more around its centre, and the last *Amen* is uttered by the same lips which opened and which led the chorus of praise.

My brethren, it seems as though the passage on which we have dwelt, and the great festival on which we are assembled, conspired to guide us to one point as the conclusion of all our meditations, THE ADORATION OF THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN.

There is a very celebrated picture by an ancient master bearing that title. It is impossible to look upon

¹ Verse 13.

² Verse 14.

it unmoved. The imagery of the Apocalyptic vision is most faithfully, I dare say most devoutly, portrayed. The impression is that of a loving earnestness, anxious to present to the very senses the scene which St John beheld when *the first voice, as of a trumpet, said to him, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter*¹. And yet it is there more than anywhere that we learn the essential difference between the Divine Word and the human copy. The first impression of that picture is amazement and awe; the second is disappointment and almost displeasure. The description of the Lamb that was slain is for the ear and for the soul, not for the eye, nor for literal embodiment. It is to the thing signified, not to the sign, that I would direct your gaze to-night.

If we may judge by the few glimpses of heavenly things which the Scripture, which this book of Scripture more particularly, presents to us, adoration, simple adoration, is one great part of the work of heaven. Have any of us known what it is to be in the presence of one whom we revere on earth? How full of happiness, of rest, of satisfaction, is the mere gazing upon that loved and honoured face! We can dispense with all else: it is enough to be in that presence; enough to take in through the eye the countenance and the mind within it: the going forth of that reverent love is of itself refreshment and comfort; we take in in the giving out.

If these things can be even on earth, judge ye what

¹ Rev. iv. 1.

they must become when read in the language of heaven ! We are scarcely aware, without purposely looking for it, how much of our public worship is mere adoration. If you were asked at the end of a solemn service in this place, What did you ask for ? what particular accessions of good, earthly or spiritual, did you implore of God ? you would find it impossible to return such an answer as should account for half or for one quarter of the time occupied. No ; we came together, in part at least, to adore : to say to ourselves, to say to one another, to say before God, How great is He ! how glorious ! how wonderful in His works and ways, as well as in His goodness toward the children of men ! What else, what more, is contained in that oft-repeated doxology, *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost ; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end ?* Many of us, I fear, treat that doxology as a form, a vain repetition ; and so that other doxology with which sermons conclude. But in these things our whole soul ought to go forth to Him who is spoken of : then most of all are we anticipating the worship of *just men made perfect*¹. We are far too apt to measure all worship and all religious knowledge by its direct bearing upon ourselves. In reading the Word of God, we select just those parts which seem to have something for the soul, in the way of comfort or of exhortation, and we throw aside the rest. Whereas, if we were fully *instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*², we should regard all as having a

¹ Heb. xii. 23.² Matt. xiii. 52.

direct bearing upon us which tells us anything whatever of what God is; which gives us any new insight into His character, into His attributes, into His purposes, into His mind and will. Everything which adds to our knowledge of God adds to our store for praise.

And even thus is it with our Lord Jesus Christ also. It is a selfish doctrine which altogether confounds thanksgiving and praise. The exhortation distinguishes the two. *To render thanks for the great benefits received at His hands*; that is thanksgiving. *To set forth His most worthy praise*; to tell, that is, what He is in Himself; that is adoration, that is praise.

And do not the holy Angels themselves teach us a lesson on this point in their doxology of which we have spoken to-night? They had not sinned; they needed not redemption; the blood of Christ was not shed for them; *He took not on Him the nature of angels*¹; not for their sake did He *humble Himself and become obedient unto death*². And yet it is they who sing, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!* Assuredly, my brethren, there is something in this Easter festival which should raise our thoughts above self, even when salvation is in question. If we know not yet that Christ has saved us personally, still we can begin to praise. We can say with the Angels, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain*, if we cannot yet add with St Paul, *who loved me and gave Himself for me*³. And it is through this view of Christ that the other, the more personal hope, has been ere now gained.

¹ Heb. ii. 16.

² Phil. ii. 8.

³ Gal. ii. 20.

LECTURE XII.

REVELATION VI. 16.

*Hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne,
and from the wrath of the Lamb.*

THE sealed roll has been taken out of the hand of Him that sat on the throne, and the Lamb has *prevailed to open* it¹. The threefold adoration; the thrice repeated doxology, of the elders, of the Angels, and of the created universe; which occupied our thoughts on the evening of Easter Sunday, is at length silent. A hush of expectation pervades the heavenly presence, and the chapter which comes before us to-night will tell the story of that breaking of the seals which is to set the revelation free and turn *the mystery of God*² into a secret told. May God give us the wisdom to speak and the grace to hear, not only with understanding, but unto edifying!

*And³ I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals,
and I heard one of the four living creatures saying, as it*

¹ Rev. v. 5.

² Rev. x. 7.

³ Verse 1.

were a voice of thunder, *Come*. And¹ I saw, and behold, a horse all white; and one who sat upon him, having a bow; and there was given to him a crown; and he went forth conquering and that he might conquer.

The opening of each separate seal is not the opening of a portion of the roll, but a necessary preliminary to the opening of the entire roll. What the Prophet sees, as each particular seal is broken, is not something in the roll itself, but something which occurs on the stage of vision at the moment when that step is taken towards the unfolding of God's counsels.

In the case of the first four seals, the act of breaking is followed by a loud utterance from one of the four living beings which represent the universe of animated creation. The vision which is thus introduced affects creation in some one of its great departments.

The utterance itself consists of the single word, *Come*; not, as the ordinary reading gives it, *Come and see*. The latter would have been addressed to the Prophet: the former is more probably addressed to the Lamb of God, whose coming in glory is the desire and *expectation of the creation*², and is in some definite manner promoted and advanced by that which the accompanying vision denotes.

The particular vision which attends the breaking of the first seal is that of a white horse, with a rider bearing a bow, with its sharp arrows ready for conflict, and a crown, the emblem of victory. It has been usual to see

¹ Verse 2.

² Rom. viii. 19.

in this figure the person of our Lord Jesus Christ going forth, in His righteous government and by His holy Gospel, conquering and to conquer. Similar emblems are applied to Him in the 45th Psalm¹, and in the 19th chapter of this book². But the similitudes of Scripture are not to be thus restricted to one sole application: and a comparison of this with subsequent figures will guide us rather to the notion of human warfare, of invasion and conquest, as the reality here to be understood. The suffering and oppressed Church of the time of St John is taught to connect the idea of conquest—of such victories as those which had extended and were to extend over the whole known earth the dominion of imperial Rome—first with the overruling sovereignty of God, out of whose presence and by whose edict all human power goes forth, and secondly with the final establishment of a power not human, even with the coming of Him who is the Lord of the Church, and to whom all the kingdoms of the earth shall be eventually made to bow.

And³ when He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. And⁴ there came forth another horse, red; and to him that sat upon him it was given to take peace out of the earth, and that they shall slay one another; and there was given to him a great sword.

The former was a vision of conquest; this is a vision of intestine discord, of civil war. *They shall kill one another.* And this too is both overruled by God Himself for His own work of power and grace, and also con-

¹ Psalm xlv. 3, 4, 5.

³ Verse 3.

² Rev. xix. 11—16.

⁴ Verse 4.

duces in some definite manner to the coming of Christ; to the overthrow of opposing force, and to the establishment of His reign on earth.

And¹ when He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a horse all black; and one that sat upon him, having a balance in his hand. And² I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A chœnix of wheat for a denarius, and three chœnixes of barley for a denarius; and the oil and the wine injure thou not. This rider upon the black horse is the image of scarcity. The balance in his hand recalls the words of the prophecy of Ezekiel. *And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight. Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment; that they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity³.* When corn has to be weighed, not measured, it is a time of scarcity. This too is one of God's judgments.

In this instance, however, the operation of the judgment is to be limited. A voice is heard, fixing bounds to the severity of the infliction. The chœnix was from a pint and a half to a quart of English dry measure: and a chœnix of wheat was reckoned as a day's provision, a somewhat scanty day's provision, for one man. The denarius, varying at different times from about eight pence half-penny to seven pence half-penny of our

¹ Verse 5.

² Verse 6.

³ Ezek. iv. 10, 16, 17.

money, was the daily pay of a common soldier, and the average wages (it may be inferred, for example, from the language of the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard) of a working man¹. Thus the whole of a day's earnings would go in the purchase of one man's bread. Nothing would be left over for the purpose of one superfluity, or even for securing house or clothing. If others depend upon him, he must have recourse to the cheaper and less nutritious form of food, and instead of his choenix of wheat must content himself with the equivalent three choenixes of barley. But the dearth here predicted stops short of absolute famine. Food there shall be, though dear and scanty: the oil and the wine are not yet to be injured: there is to be anxiety and difficulty and distress, but thus far not starvation.

And² when He opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living creature saying, Come. And³ I saw, and behold, a horse all livid, of a pale, green, discoloured hue; and one who sat upon him, his name Death; and Hades, the personification of the grave and of the abode of the dead, followeth with him: and there was given him authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill through sword, and through famine, and through death, that is, by pestilence, and by the wild beasts of the earth. Hades has been described here as the hearse of death; following to receive those whom death strikes down. And you will observe here the enumeration of all those forms of destruction which are given in one of the prophecies of Ezekiel as

¹ Matt. xx. 2.

² Verse 7.

³ Verse 8.

God's *four sore judgments*¹; *the sword, and famine, and pestilence, and those noisome* (destructive) *beasts* which come to take possession of a region depopulated by the former calamities.

Thus the first four visions have given us the various images of conquest, of civil war, of scarcity, and of mortality. Each of these is presented to the eyes of a suffering and buffeted Church, as one of those *all things* which are in the hands of God, and which are *working together for eventual good*² to the cause of Christ on earth. Each one of them is prefaced by the call to Him, on the part of Creation itself, to come and deliver it *from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*³.

The fifth vision is of a different character, and differently introduced.

*And*⁴ *when He opened the fifth seal, I saw beneath the altar*—we have not yet had an altar described as part of the scene; but the transition to the imagery of the earthly temple, with its great altar of burnt-offering standing in front of the building, is easily and naturally made—the *souls of them that had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they held*. The word here used for the *souls* of the martyred saints is that which expresses their natural life rather than their spiritual: their spirits are in the Paradise of the blessed⁵; their *lives* (if the expression might be used) are seen at the bottom of the altar on which they had been offered

¹ Ezek. xiv. 21.

² Rom. viii. 28.

³ Rom. viii. 21.

⁴ Verse 9.

⁵ Luke xxiii. 43.

in sacrifice to God. *The blood is the life*¹ was the repeated statement of the Old Testament. And in one section of the Levitical Law we read this precise instruction. *The priest...shall pour all the blood of the sacrifice at the bottom of the altar of the burnt-offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation*². The image then is that of the blood of righteous Abel *crying from the ground*³ against his murderer: only here, in accordance with the subject, it is as it were personified and dramatized into the voice of souls. *And*⁴ *they cried with a loud voice, saying, Until when, Thou Master, the holy one and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood—how long dost Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood—from those who dwell on the earth?* It is not that saints in Paradise desire vengeance: it is the voice of their blood crying from the ground, and rising into the ears of a righteous Judge who cannot suffer iniquity and cruelty to triumph as now for ever. *And*⁵ *there was given to them white raiment, and it was bidden them that they shall rest yet a while, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren who are to be slain as they themselves also were, shall have fulfilled, or completed, their work, or their course.*

Here then to the other predicted troubles amidst which and in which is to be heard the cry of Creation for the coming of the Lord Jesus; amidst which and in which the Church of Christ is to see by faith the controlling hand of God and the very prophecy of their

¹ Deut. xii. 23.² Lev. iv. 7.³ Gen. iv. 10.⁴ Verse 10.⁵ Verse 11.

glory ; is added yet this, the sign of martyrdom, of lives given willingly in Christ's cause, of persecution even unto death befalling those who have devoted themselves in soul and in body to His service. This also, *the righteous blood shed upon the earth*¹ in the cause of Christ, is, if it be rightly understood, a sign, not of the discomfiture of His truth, but of the certainty of His coming to judgment. It is thus that St Paul uses it in his 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians. *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer; seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe*².

And the opening of the sixth seal is followed by signs of this very result.

*And*³ *I saw when He opened the sixth seal, and there arose a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon all became as blood, and*⁴ *the*

¹ Matt. xxiii. 35.

³ Verse 12.

² 2 Thess. i. 4—10.

⁴ Verse 13.

stars of the heaven fell to the earth, like a fig-tree having shed its winter figs when shaken by a great wind; and¹ the heaven was withdrawn like a scroll in the act of being rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And² the kings of the earth, and the chiefs, and the commanders, and the rich, and the strong, and every man bond and free, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and³ say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: because there came the great day of His wrath, and who is able to stand?

We recognize in this passage much of the imagery of the Old Testament Prophets. *I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come⁴. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering⁵. All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree⁶. The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up... And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth⁷. They*

¹ Verse 14.

² Verse 15.

³ Verse 16.

⁴ Joel ii. 30, 31.

⁵ Isai. l. 3.

⁶ Isai. xxxiv. 3, 4.

⁷ Isai. ii. 12, 19.

shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us¹. I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by His fierce anger².

Whatever secondary fulfilments this opening of the sixth seal may have found in history; as in the fall of the Roman Empire, or in the destruction of idolatry, or in the demolition of any great persecuting and oppressing power in any age of the world; who does not feel as he listens to it, that it has one, and can have but one, full and exhaustive accomplishment, in the events which shall precede and usher in the second coming of our Lord Himself for judgment?

And now, drawing towards the last application of the striking and important passage which has engaged our attention to-night, I must beg you to observe that the key to its meaning is to be found, in every particular, in our Saviour's great prophecy, contained in the 24th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel, and in the 13th chapter of the Gospel by St Mark, and delivered in answer to the question of His disciples as they sat with Him over against the temple, *Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world³?*

¹ Hosea x. 8.

² Jer. iv. 23—26.

³ Matt. xxiv. 3.

We have interpreted the six visions disclosed in the chapter from which the text is taken, as predicting troubles and sorrows to come upon the world and upon the Church, and as assuring the true servants of God that all these things are under His control and governance, and shall all issue in and contribute to that final establishment of Christ's kingdom which shall involve the overthrow of every kind and form of evil. Now refer, in this connection, to the following verses of the 24th chapter of St Matthew. *Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars; the white horse of conquest, and his rider armed with the bow and going forth conquering and to conquer; see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; the red horse of intestine discord, and his rider, to whom was given the great sword, to take peace from the earth; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, the black horse of scarcity, and the pale horse of mortality, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows¹. Then shall they deliver you up (what can be more exact, more remarkable, than the coincidence of very order and sequence of the two lines of prediction?) to be afflicted, and shall kill you; souls shall be seen under the altar, martyred lives, of those who have been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they bore: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved². And then, Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and*

¹ Matt. xxiv. 6—8.² Matt. xxiv. 9, 13.

*the moon shall not give her light—the very figures of the sixth seal—and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; they shall hide themselves, the other prophecy says, in the very dens and rocks of the mountains, from the anticipated wrath of the Lamb; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory*¹. The 6th chapter of this book of Revelation, and with it the result of the opening of the sixth seal, stops just short of this actual coming of the Son of Man. All is prepared; the terror of that expectation has fallen upon the wicked; but there still remains one preliminary of which we shall hope to speak on the next Sunday evening.

I have found it most difficult to compress into one discourse the great revelation which has now come before us, and to coerce on every side the desire to justify and to enforce the interpretation given. One word I must add, in reference to the parallel prophecy of St Matthew's Gospel. What a commentary upon that prophecy is the chapter now before us! It is the ancient belief, whatever difficulties may beset it, that the book of Revelation was written after the destruction of Jerusalem; under Domitian, not under Nero. If this be so, remark that St John, and He who taught and inspired St John with the vision of truth, did not consider the prophecy of our Lord contained in the chapter referred to, to be completed and done with, as many would now

¹ Matt. xxiv. 29, 30.

tell us, when Jerusalem fell. The ruin of Jerusalem, and of the Mosaic and Levitical institutions with it, was a fulfilment, but not the fulfilment, of our Saviour's words. Those words are wonderful in all senses; not least in this sense, that they are manifold in their accomplishment. Wherever there is a little flock in a waste wilderness; wherever there is a Church in a world; wherever there is a power of unbelief, ungodliness, and violence, throwing itself upon Christ's faith and Christ's people, and seeking to overbear and to demolish and to destroy; whether that power be the power of Jewish bigotry and fanaticism, as in the days of the first disciples; or of Pagan Rome, with its idolatries and its cruelties, as in the days of St John and of the Revelation; or of Papal Rome, with its lying wonders and its anti-christian assumptions, in ages later still; or of open and rampant Atheism, as in the days of the first French Revolution; or of a subtler and more insidious infidelity, like that which is threatening now to *deceive, if it were possible, the very elect*¹; wherever and whatever this power be—and it has had a thousand forms, and may be destined yet to assume a thousand more—then, in each successive century, the words of Christ to His first disciples adapt themselves afresh to the circumstances of His struggling servants; warn them of danger, exhort them to patience, arouse them to hope, assure them of victory; tell of a near end, for the individual and for the generation; tell also of a far end, not for ever to be

¹ Matt. xxiv. 24.

postponed, for time itself and for the world; predict a destruction which shall befall each enemy of the truth, and predict a destruction which shall befall the enemy himself whom each in turn has represented and served; explain the meaning of tribulation, show whence it comes, and point to its swallowing up in glory; reveal the moving hand above, and disclose, from behind the cloud which conceals it, the clear definite purpose and the unchanging loving will. Thus understood, each separate downfall of evil becomes a prophecy of the next and of the last: and the partial fulfilment of our Lord's words in the destruction of Jerusalem, or of St John's words in the downfall of idolatry and the dismemberment of Rome, becomes itself in turn a new warrant for the Church's expectation of the second Advent and of the day of Judgment.

My brethren, shall that expectation of the Church be to you, to each one of us who are here this night assembled, a hope, or a fear?

1. I address doubtless some to-night whose prevailing spiritual condition is one of carelessness. I say not how it may be with them while they listen to the Word of God in this place: but mark their course through the week which follows; mark, as man cannot, but as God can and does, their secret walk before the Father of spirits; and we cannot say that it is Christian, we cannot say that it is vigilant, we cannot say that it is reverent, we cannot say that it is that of one who is really waiting for the return of the Son of God to judgment. O, my brethren, would to God that you would listen inwardly

to the revelation of a day in which you must be an actor! Let the words of the text itself move you. *Hide us from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!* The face of God; you must see it one day; O can you bear it? What will it be to you? Will it be to you the face of a Father? Will it be to you a face known long by faith, in the intercourse, through long months and years of earthly life, of a true, a spiritual communion? Will it be to you a face which has often shone upon you with benediction and peace, assuring you of pardon, and enlightening you with grace? Or will the other be your conception of it; that fearful thing which is expressed in words burning with their concentrated intensity, *the wrath of the Lamb?* the wrath, the displeasure, the indignation, the slowly and reluctantly gathered yet now unalterable and inevitable judgment, of Him who was once your Sacrifice for sin, your Propitiation, your *Advocate with the Father*¹, yea, the very *Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world*²? Nay, my brethren, if the very Lamb of God be angry, where shall we find a refuge? O while yet He is your Saviour, know Him, we beseech you, and flee to Him as such!

2. And I speak to some—God grant they be many—who have done this; who know Christ as the Lamb of God; who have given Him their sins to cancel for ever with His most precious blood, and themselves too, their souls and bodies, to be that daily sacrifice of praise

¹ 1 John ii. 1. ² John i. 29.

and thanksgiving in which He is well pleased. The revelation before us is full of comfort for these. It says to them, *God is on your side*; be not afraid: *what can man do unto you*¹? be not afraid of change inward or outward; be not alarmed at *wars and rumours of wars*²; dread not civil commotions; tremble not at days of want, of disease, of prevalent mortality; *a thousand shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee*³; or, if it does, it shall be only as the messenger of thy Saviour, to give thee a speedier entrance into the world of life and joy. *All things are yours; life and death, things present and things to come*⁴. When the last great day comes, for you it shall have no terror. *The wrath of the Lamb* shall be a combination unknown to you. To you *the sign of the Son of Man in heaven*⁵ shall be but the accomplishment of His own gracious promise, *I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also*⁶.

¹ Psalm cxviii. 6.² Matt. xxiv. 6.³ Psalm xci. 7.⁴ 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22.⁵ Matt. xxiv. 30.⁶ John xiv. 3.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER,

April 14, 1861.

LECTURE XIII.

REVELATION VII. 2, 3.

And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

WE are in momentary expectation of the opening of the seventh seal. Six seals have been broken; and the breaking of each has been followed by a certain sign witnessed on the stage of vision. It has been shown how each one of the great classes of human suffering is in reality under the control of God, and how each one is premonitory of and preparatory for the return of Christ in glory. The cry of creation which introduces each is the brief and significant *Come*, addressed to *the Lamb that was slain*, and expressing that *earnest expectation of the creature* itself, which is waiting, ever waiting,

*for the manifestation of the sons of God*¹. There has been seen the white horse of conquest, and the red horse of discord, and the black horse of scarcity, and the pale horse of mortality; there has been seen, as the fifth seal was broken, the vivid image of Christian martyrdom; and at the opening of the sixth, the fearful representation of those last terrors which shall instantly precede the second Advent of the Son of Man. We were prepared therefore to expect the immediate opening of the seventh and last seal, and with it the arrival of the consummation of all things.

But a whole chapter intervenes. Might it not be apprehended that amidst convulsions so terrific as those described under the opening of the sixth seal the Church itself might founder? Who shall secure Christ's servants against being involved in that catastrophe? Such is the misgiving to which the particular revelation now before us would minister.

*And*² *after this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding fast the four winds of the earth, that there might not breathe a wind upon the earth, nor upon the sea, nor against any tree.*

The winds are the symbols of judgment. And *the four winds* indicate the universality of that judgment: it comes from every quarter. Thus we read in the prophet Jeremiah: *Upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven*; explained by the words which follow, *And I will bring evil upon them, even my*

¹ Rom. viii. 19.

² Verse 1.

*fierce anger, saith the Lord*¹. And so in the prophecy of Daniel: *I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea*².

The winds are symbols of judgment; and the Angels are to be executioners of that judgment. They are so described in the verse which follows. But at present they are seen restraining the winds. They have thus a double office, which will become apparent as we proceed.

*And*³ *I saw another angel going up from the rising of the sun, ascending from that point on the horizon which is the exact place of the sunrise, having a seal of (belonging to) the living God. The mission of this Angel is entirely one of hope and cheering: he rises from the east, the quarter of light and of the dayspring. Thus the emblem is that of the song of Zacharias: Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*⁴.

*And he was crying, as he went up, with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to injure the earth and the sea, saying*⁵, *Injure ye not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.*

Until we have sealed. One alone actually impresses the seal: the rest concur and assist by restraining the operation of judgment until the sealing is accomplished.

The image of the sealing is derived from the book of

¹ Jer. xlix. 36, 37.

² Dan. vii. 2.

³ Verse 2.

⁴ Luke i. 78, 79.

⁵ Verse 3.

the prophet Ezekiel. There, too, are found the executioners of vengeance, in contrast with the one sealer. *And behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter-weapon in his hand: and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side...And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others He said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity...but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary...And behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me¹.* Even such is the object of the sealing here. It is to mark out certain persons as belonging to God, and thus to save them from being involved in those last judgments which are coming upon the world. The seal is that which appropriates. When the question is asked, *Whose is this image and superscription?*² the answer will be, *God's*; and the consequence will be respect and safety. The effect of the seal visible in the forehead will be like that of the blood upon the door-post of the Israelites, in the last and sorest of the plagues of Egypt. *When He seeth it, He will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite*

¹ Ezek. ix. 2—6, 11.² Matt. xxii. 20.

*you*¹. The ministers of God's judgment have it equally in charge to spare the righteous and to slay the wicked. They whose mission it is to consume the guilty city, have first to lead out of it the one servant of God within it. *Haste thee, escape thither*, to the place of safety, *for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither*². It is said to them, *Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation*, as well as to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished³.

And⁴ I heard the number of the sealed; there were a hundred and forty and four thousand sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel (Jacob): out⁵ of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand sealed: out of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand: out of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand: out⁶ of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand: out of the tribe of Nephthalim twelve thousand: out of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand: out⁷ of the tribe of Symeon twelve thousand: out of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand: out of the tribe of Isachar twelve thousand: out⁸ of the tribe of Zabulon twelve thousand: out of the tribe of Joseph (Ephraim) twelve thousand: out of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand sealed.

There is much that is remarkable in this enumeration. No one, I suppose, ever dreamed of taking it literally; of supposing it to say that precisely twelve

¹ Exod. xii. 23.² Gen. xix. 22.³ 2 Pet. ii. 9.⁴ Verse 4.⁵ Verse 5.⁶ Verse 6.⁷ Verse 7.⁸ Verse 8.

thousand persons, neither less nor more, of the Israelites of each tribe were eternally saved. But though not to this extent, there have been those who restrict the passage to the national Israel, and see in it a description of that *remnant according to the election of grace*¹ of which St Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Romans as gathered out from the generally unbelieving nation. Nothing can be more erroneous than this restriction. The whole language of the book of Revelation testifies against it. The Israel spoken of in it everywhere is *the Israel of God*²; the true *circumcision, in the spirit, not in the letter*³; they who *worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*⁴.

But I must not occupy our time this evening with a discussion of the opinions of men. It will be enough to point out very briefly a few of the peculiarities of this description; to assign its place as a whole in the prophecy before us; and then to draw from it its solemn lessons for ourselves.

Many things in the enumeration itself caution us against a servile adherence to its literal meaning. One tribe of Israel is altogether omitted, the tribe of Dan. Judah, the fourth in order of birth among the sons of Jacob, here stands first; it was the tribe from which the Saviour sprang. Levi is again found, and now in a subordinate place, among his brethren: there is no longer a Mosaic ritual, nor a human priesthood. No

¹ Rom. xi. 5.

² Gal. vi. 16.

³ Rom. ii. 29.

⁴ Phil. iii. 3.

discernible order is preserved in the enumeration ; as if to show that distinctions of birth are done away in Christ, and that the thing spoken of is wholly above and beyond all questions of parentage or blood or race. The Israel here spoken of is the Israel not of man but of God : in Christ Jesus *is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all*¹.

We have already seen, and shall have still more occasion to notice in the concluding chapters of this book, that the number twelve is significant of the Church. Thus in one of the latest chapters we read of that glorious city which is the Church of heaven, that it *had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel...and the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb*². That passage contains, it may be, the origin of the selection. The twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. Thus the number of the sealed is a hundred and forty and four thousand ; the number twelve multiplied by itself first, and then by thousands. It denotes multitude, completeness, perfection : it expresses the accomplishing of the number of the elect, and the fulness of Christ's kingdom.

And can we doubt, after proceeding thus far, what is the precise thing designated by the sealing? We

¹ Col. iii. 11.

² Rev. xxi. 12, 14.

have seen God's judgments abroad in the earth: we have seen the train and procession of executioners, starting with the sword of Roman conquest, and ending with the prognostications of the instantly impending Advent. We have heard great men and mighty men and chief captains, the rich and the strong, yes, high and low, bond and free, one with another, calling to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and to hide them from the imminent wrath of the Lamb. And we have traced the very same line of prediction through our Lord's own prophecy of the things that should come, as it is written in the 24th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel and the 13th chapter of the Gospel by St Mark. We have seen there also the very same order and sequence: wars and rumours of wars; nation rising against nation; famines, pestilences, then martyrdoms; then, after those tribulations, the sun darkened and the moon withdrawing her light, and the sign of the Son of Man already seen in heaven. He is, as it were, in act to descend. The sixth seal is opened, the seventh is trembling for its breaking. At that point the one prophecy says, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, restraining the four winds of final, devastating, desolating judgment; and I saw another angel rising from the east, and bidding them wait till he should have sealed, for distinction and preservation, the servants of his God and theirs: and the other prophecy says, *The Son of Man shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to*

*the other*¹. What can be more precise, to the very letter, to the very end, than the coincidence of the two prophecies? What more evident, to one who will judge of Scripture by Scripture and ask the Holy Spirit who inspired both to interpret to him each by each, than that the *sealed* of the one are the *elect* of the other, and that the loving purpose and the preserving care in the one and in the other is the same, not less in the occasion of its exercise than in the nature of its operation?

The next paragraph, our next discourse, will extend and enlarge the field of vision, from the hundred and forty and four thousand sealed, to the *great multitude which no man could number standing before the throne and before the Lamb*²: but for the present our eye is fixed upon that particular generation, be it what it may—it may be even our own—which shall be alive upon the earth at Christ's second coming: we are taught to expect that, as it was in the destruction of Jerusalem, so shall it be in the still more terrible judgments of the last time; *they that are Christ's*³ shall be safe in their Ark whatever happens; the Deluge which overwhelms all else shall only *bear it up*⁴; *the Lord knoweth them that are His*⁵, and the *seal in the forehead* shall be their safeguard from all evil. *For the elect's sake, whom He hath chosen, He hath shortened the days*⁶. *If it were possible—but it is not possible—they shall deceive the very*

¹ Matt. xxiv. 31.² Rev. vii. 9.³ 1 Cor. xv. 23.⁴ Gen. vii. 17.⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 19.⁶ Mark xiii. 20.

*elect*¹. Then shall He send His angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven².

Such is the vision of the sealing. It is the other side of that picture of gloom and terror upon which we gazed last Sunday. It is the secret of that difference which we see everywhere around us between man and man. It is the explanation of that profound calm, of that quiet confidence, of that invincible strength, of that bright hope, which has been seen again and again, in hours of private distress and of public danger, in those and in those only who have the Lord for their God. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee*³. *There was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings*⁴.

My brethren, in these days of quiet ease we can scarcely read as we ought either this or any other of the revelations of this Book. It was written in days of depression, of persecution, of alarm: it is only in such days that it can be duly read. There are countries even now in which the true flock of Christ is a small and despised remnant; perhaps even in our own land, perhaps very near to us, there are homes in which the true Christian is solitary, rejected, ridiculed; there the thought of the sealing is full of comfort, full

¹ Matt. xxiv. 24.

² Mark xiii. 27.

³ Isai. xxvi. 3.

⁴ Exod. x. 22, 23.

of help; the doctrine of the Divine election becomes there not an abstruse theory but a living strength, and God is glorified in it.

But can any passage of God's Word be more full of serious, anxious, discriminating thought for every one of us? Our days are days of quietness; days of permitted, of encouraged, of respected religion; days of wide-spread, almost of promiscuous profession. It is true: but not on that account *is the offence of the Cross ceased*¹; not on that account is consistency less difficult, temptation less searching, sin less virulent; not on that account is distress and anguish, inward and outward, spiritual, mental, bodily, less frequent of occurrence, or less hard to bear; not on that account are the misgivings of the soul less painful, the heart-searchings of a deathbed less agonizing, or the realities of a coming judgment less certain or less terrible. Only the sealed can pass through any of these safely. O, my brethren, is the seal of God in your forehead? Can you not tell? Does the inspired Word leave us in doubt on that grave subject? What is God's seal? St Paul answers that question when he says, in his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, *Now He who stablisheth us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts*². And again, in writing to the Ephesians, *And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, wherein ye were sealed unto a day of redemption*³. The Holy Spirit is God's

¹ Gal. v. 11.² 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.³ Eph. iv. 30.

seal. Where He is, there is safety. Where He is, God sees His mark, His own possession, one who belongs to Him, one over whom He watches, one whom He will keep in that *hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth*¹.

And does any one doubt whether this Holy Spirit dwells in him? Where His fruits are, there is He: where is *love, and joy, and peace, and long-suffering, and gentleness, and goodness, and faith, and meekness, and temperance*², where is the love of Christ and charity towards all men, there is the Holy Spirit of God, there is God's seal, there is he who shall be safe from condemnation, there is he who *shall not be hurt of the second death*³.

The subject itself suggests two words of concluding advice.

1. First, to those who hope that they have the seal of God. I might say to you, *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*⁴. I might say, *Grieve not that Holy Spirit by whom ye were sealed*⁵. I might say, Be eager to press on unto perfection; remembering who has said, *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance*⁶. All these are grave and needful warnings. O slip not back by little and little from your present standingplace! O suffer not a self-confident and at last a self-righteous spirit to rob you of that only strength, of that only safeguard, which is in

¹ Rev. iii. 10.

² Gal. v. 22, 23.

³ Rev. ii. 11.

⁴ 1 Cor. x. 12.

⁵ Eph. iv. 30.

⁶ Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.

the Holy Spirit Himself, who is your badge and seal! But for to-night my word of application is different. It is as to the spirit in which you walk *toward them that are without*¹, toward those who are destitute of God's seal. There is such a thing—we see too much of it—as a selfish spirit even in the things of God. There are those to whom their own safety is all in all. There are those to whom it is no real concern if others perish. They cannot help it, they say. Perhaps they misplace the revelation of God's seal, the doctrine of the divine election, and say, It is of God that *one is taken and the other left*²; I cannot reverse it. No, but you can and you ought to mourn over the ruin of the reprobate, over the perdition of the lost. You ought to be able to say with the Psalmist, *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not Thy law*³. *I am horribly afraid for the ungodly that forsake Thy law*⁴. It ought to press heavily upon you to see so large a portion (we must fear) of God's human creation hurrying on blindfold to the horrible despair of the last day. You ought to be able to enter into the humane and pious feeling of that great and good man of a century ago, who, believing in the absolute sovereignty of God to choose whom He will for salvation and to condemn whom He will to ruin, yet devoted one day in each week to mourning and lamentation over the perdition of the wicked, as though the doctrine itself which his intellect

¹ Col. 4. 5.² Luke xvii. 34.³ Psalm cxix. 136.⁴ Psalm cxix. 53 (Prayer-Book Version).

accepted was so bitter to his heart that it was a very crucifixion of self to bow down in the belief of it before the throne of the Almighty. We who hold not his doctrine in that bare and fearful form might even the more be expected to imitate his practice. Our mourning for the wicked who live around us might express not anguish for an unchangeable decree, but rather intercession for the averting of a doom not yet finally spoken. And will not that mourning express itself also in efforts, real, earnest and unwearied, to pluck at least some *brands from the burning*¹, through the grace of that Saviour who still pleads with and still pleads for us?

2. But my last word to-night must be addressed to the unsealed. There are those here to-night who are quite conscious that there is no saving mark on their forehead. There was once a mark there. In Holy Baptism that infant brow was signed for a moment with the sign of Christ's cross, in token that there was present there a bespoken servant, an enlisted soldier, of the Lamb that was slain. But where is that mark now? O how long, how utterly, has it been erased! Sins of the world, sins of the flesh, sins of the devil; vanity folly, self-pleasing—whatever self-pleasing was for him, perhaps intemperance, perhaps passion, perhaps deadly lust—these things came for admittance, and were harboured in the secret soul; fainter and fainter grew the seal of promised service, until the divine ownership was

¹ Amos iv. 11.

quite forgotten, and the willing *slave of sin* became at last *free from righteousness*¹. And there are those here to-night—more still perhaps in number—who without *running to any excess of riot*², have yet lived forgetful of Christ, and cannot say even to themselves that they are ready for the day of His appearing. And there are here also to-night a few utter self-deceivers; persons who are cherishing a fallacious hope, one which cannot possibly abide *the day which shall be revealed in fire*, and when *the fire shall try every man's hope*, as well as *every man's work, of what sort it is*³. O, my brethren, careless, sinful, self-deceiving, as the case may be, *to you is the word of salvation yet once more sent*⁴! To you is the minister of Christ commissioned to tell of that coming tempest which shall mingle earth and sea and sky, and in which none shall be able to stand except Christ's sealed. *On them the fire of judgment shall have no power; not an hair of their head shall be singed, neither shall the smell of fire pass upon them*⁵. O pray—that you can still do, if it be but the cry of him who durst not *lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven*⁶—pray, in words few, direct, importunate, that God, while yet there is time, will stamp His seal on you! What that seal is, you know: it is the holy and blessed Spirit, of whom it is expressly written, *Ask, and it shall be given you*⁷...God will *give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him*⁸. But

¹ Rom. vi. 20.² 1 Pet. iv. 4.³ 1 Cor. iii. 13.⁴ Acts xiii. 26.⁵ Dan. iii. 27.⁶ Luke xviii. 13.⁷ Matt. vii. 7.⁸ Luke xi. 13.

lose not an hour. There are hearts so hard that grace itself ceases to soften them ; brows so obdurate that the very seal of the living God makes no impress !

*See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh*¹.

¹ Heb. xii. 25.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER,

April 21, 1861.

LECTURE XIV.

REVELATION VII. 13.

What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

WE are still occupying the interval between the opening of the sixth and of the seventh seal. The fearful sights and signs which accompanied the former, those vain cries for protection and concealment *from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb*¹ have been followed by a widely different vision, assuring Christ's true servants of perfect safety among the terrors and judgments of the latter days. A certain number, large, compact, symmetrical, accurately foreknown in its sum and in its items, has been disclosed to the seer under the figure of a sealing; a marking of the servants of God with God's seal, as their safeguard against the ministry of the destroyer. We saw in this a special reference to the generation of men which shall be alive upon the earth at our Lord's second Advent. We

¹ Rev. vi. 16.

noticed the exact conformity of this, as of former parts of the prophecy now before us, to our Saviour's own description of the times of the end. As here the ministry of Angels is employed to protect the servants of God from the blast of those *four winds* which are symbolical of a desolating and a world-wide judgment; so there we read that as soon as *the sign of the Son of Man appears in heaven* to the discomfiture of *the tribes of the earth*¹, the Angels shall be *sent forth to gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven*². The elect there are the sealed here.

But there is a vision yet beyond. The effect of the sealing is negative: it protects from judgment. The sealed man is a safe man: *there shall no torment touch him*³. But though safety is a great thing, it is not everything. The revelations of God in Christ are not nay but yea: *in Him is yea, and in Him Amen*⁴. Let us ask not only what the servants of Christ shall not be; not condemned, not outcast, not lost, not miserable; but also, further, what they shall be. Let us raise the curtain, God helping us, from the world which is beyond death and the grave, and see to-night, in some of its particulars—future visions will show us more of them—what is the state which God destines for His people, when they shall have safely surmounted *the waves of this troublesome world*, and reached by his guiding hand *the haven where they would be*⁵.

¹ Matt. xxiv. 30.² Mark xiii. 27.³ Wisd. iii. 1.⁴ 2 Cor. i. 20.⁵ Psalm cvii. 30.

After¹ these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which to number no man was able, out of every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, persons standing before (in presence of) the throne and before (in presence of) the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands.

This last figure guides us to the true interpretation of the imagery employed. We are not to think here of heathen uses of the palm as an emblem of victory: a far sweeter and holier reminiscence is awakened. The scene before us is the antitype of the most joyous and inspiring of all the observances of Israel, that of the feast of Tabernacles; instituted, as you know, in commemoration of God's care and protection during their wanderings in the wilderness², and also of His continued Providence in the supply of all the fruits of the earth in their season³. It was held at the close of the year's out-door labours: with it the season of rest began. The festival itself was marked by many peculiar and expressive ceremonies. During its continuance the houses were deserted, and the whole population lived in booths or arbours made of or adorned with leafy boughs of trees; carrying in their hands, wherever they went to and fro, branches of palm; and praising God with loud songs for His mercies to their nation in every age, and rejoicing before Him in the completion yet once more of the toils of vintage and of harvest. The 8th chapter of the book of Nehemiah describes the

¹ Verse 9.

² Lev. xxiii. 43.

³ Exod. xxiii. 16.

revival of this institution in the days following the return from Babylon. *They found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month; and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches and pine branches and myrtle branches and palm branches and branches of thick trees to make booths, as it is written. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water-gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths...and there was very great gladness¹.* Other significant rites had been added to the original institution, to which something of allusion may here be observed. Thus, at the time of the morning oblation, either on each day or certainly on the eighth day of the feast, a priest drew a vessel full of water from the fount of Siloam, and poured it out in the court of the temple at the foot of the altar of burnt-offering, while the people sang the words of the prophet Isaiah, *Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation².* A custom to which our Lord is supposed to have referred when *in the last day, that great day of the feast*, the feast of Tabernacles, *Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst,*

¹ Neh. viii. 14—17.² Isai. xii. 3.

*let him come unto me, and drink*¹. The evening of the first day of the feast was marked by a great illumination and by torch-light dances with joyous songs. Thus, to quote a few words descriptive of the scene, *the feast of Tabernacles was a season of universal joy...the entire population again dwelt in tents, but not with the accompaniments of travel, fatigue, and solicitude; all was hilarity, all wore a holiday appearance: the varied green of the ten thousand branches of different trees; the picturesque ceremony of the water libation; the general illumination; the sacred solemnities in and before the temple; the feast, the dance, the sacred song; the full harmony of the choral music; the bright joy that lighted up every face, and the gratitude at harvest home, which swelled every bosom; all conspired to make these days a season of pure, deep, and lively joy, which, in all its elements, finds no parallel among the observances of men.*

Such is the scene from which the imagery of the passage before us is largely borrowed. The troubles of the wilderness are ended: the harvest-home of the Church is come.

*And*² *they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, our salvation is unto, is wholly due to, our God who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord*³: it is all His, from first to last; every step of the way, and its termination. Yes, self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-exaltation, vanity, there, in heaven, in God's presence, will be as impossible, as they are natural and common here.

¹ John vii. 37.

² Verse 10.

³ Psalm iii. 8.

And¹ all the angels were standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures—the scene is still that of the 4th and 5th chapters, notwithstanding the introduction of the altar in the 6th; the Angels here, as before, constitute not the inner but the outer circle, the setting as it were of the seal, the frame of the picture—and they fell before (in presence of) the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying², Amen: the (all) blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honour and the power and the strength is unto, belongs wholly to, our God unto the ages of the ages.

The great multitude which no man could number of the ransomed and saved, standing in heaven before the throne of God, join with one voice in ascribing solely to Him and to the Lamb the praise of their salvation. And the Angels, in whose presence, while earth lasted, there was joy over every sinner³, one by one, who repented, may well rejoice, with a joy accumulated and intensified, over the final ingathering of all who have been saved. Most of all, well may they echo the ascription of all glory to God and to the Lamb. *Amen*, even so; it is indeed He who hath kept us from our fall; it is indeed He who hath brought you back from yours!

And⁴ one from among the elders answered—no question had been put, but there is such a thing as answering a thought, a silent wonder—saying to me, These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they,

¹ Verse 11.

² Verse 12.

³ Luke xv. 10.

⁴ Verse 13.

and whence came they? And¹ I have said to him, I straightway said to him—the speed of the reply is denoted by the tense—My Lord, Thou knowest. The reverence expressed is not adoration. It is the awe due to an inmate of heaven, to a representative (as we have seen) of the Church already made perfect. Thou knowest; I know not: tell me.

And he said to me, These are they who come out of the great tribulation. The expression is found in the prophecy so often referred to in the 24th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be². And we can scarcely doubt its special reference to the case of those who have endured the last and sorest afflictions which usher in the coming of the great day.

The sealed, those who have been preserved as God's elect through the final tribulation, are now among the great multitude clothed in white robes. To them above all would the expression now under notice be appropriate. But is it not appropriate in some degree to all the saved? May not the sufferings of a lifetime, the whole of one life's sorrows, temptations, and distresses, be summed up with no exaggeration in the words, *the great tribulation*? Taken as a whole, looked back upon from its end, the most prosperous life has had something in it to justify its being called a tribulation. How much more the lives of Christians in those first days of

¹ Verse 14.

² Matt. xxiv. 21.

the Church when reproach and persecution were the common lot of the disciples? *These are they who come, come gradually, come successively, one after another, till all be gathered—such is the exact force of the language employed—out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* They found cleansing, in both its parts, in the blood of the Lamb. There they found a free forgiveness: there they found newness of life.

Therefore¹ are they before (in presence of) the throne of God, and serve Him by day and by night in His temple, and He that sitteth upon the throne shall tabernacle upon them. They shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more, nor shall the sun fall upon them, nor any heat, such as that of the scorching wind of the desert; because² the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, who has been seen in the vision to occupy the mid space before the throne, tends them, is their Shepherd, and leads them to life-springs of waters, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

There is but one expression here which calls for anything in the way of explanation.

He that sitteth upon the throne shall tabernacle upon them. Shall dwell as in a tent, such is the exact expression, *unto*, so as to reach and to cover, *them*. The word is that used in the 1st chapter of the Gospel by St John, *The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us*³. And again, in one of the later chapters of this

¹ Verse 15.

² Verse 17.

³ John. i. 14.

Book, *I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them as their God*¹. The verb is the same, but not the preposition. *With them* there; *unto* or *upon them* here. And there is a great beauty in the difference. There may be in each case a reference to the festival of which we have spoken, the feast of Tabernacles. God Himself, in the heavenly antitype of that festival which is here described, shall have His tabernacle, His green and leafy booth, among the rejoicing people. But instead of dwelling apart in it, like one of the inhabitants of the holy city in its joyous festival, His tabernacle shall comprehend them all. *He shall tabernacle unto*, so as to reach and cover and embrace, *them* all. He shall spread over them His protecting curtain, and they shall all be safe and at rest beneath it. Thus the language of the prophecy of Isaiah shall be exactly fulfilled, *There shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain*².

The figures of the 16th and 17th verses are derived from various passages of the Old Testament. *They shall not hunger nor thirst: neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them*³. *The Lord is my Shepherd: I shall not want.*

¹ Rev. xxi. 3.² Isai. iv. 6.³ Isai. xlix. 10.

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters*¹. *He shall feed His flock like a shepherd*². *And the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces*³.

And now, my brethren, let us gather up into one or two comprehensive heads the doctrine of this whole passage. Let us ask the question of the elder, *Whence came these?* Let us see who they are, that we may know whether we shall ever be among them. They are very briefly described as having *washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*.

1. We may bless God for that account of them. The robes were not always white. It does not say, They are those who had never sinned. It does not say, They are those who never soiled the spotless purity of their baptismal dress. No, they are those who on earth, before they left earth, had *washed their robes, and made them white*.

Therefore, my brethren, we do not turn away from the words because we are sinners; because our hearts testify against us; because we are conscious of many a stain upon these lives and souls of ours. Those of whom we here read are not of those *ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance*⁴. They are rather like him of whom we read in the prophet Zechariah, who is seen at first *clad in filthy garments*; but of whom the Angel of the Lord, or One greater yet than he, has said to those that stood before him, *Take away the*

¹ Psalm xxiii. 1, 2.

² Isai. xl. 11.

³ Isai. xxv. 8.

⁴ Luke xv. 7.

*filthy garments from him; and then to him, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment*¹. Of them might it be said, as of the Corinthians to whom St Paul addressed the words, *And such were some of you; sinners not only in the corruption of a fallen nature, but in definite act also; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*².

In the name of the Lord Jesus. Yes, they washed their robes, and made them white *in the blood of the Lamb*.

There is hope then for sinners. They are not excluded. Some of those who form this glorious company in heaven had occasion to wash their robes even from very foul stains. But, my brethren, is that washing done in us? It is little to say, We may wash our robes, however stained and soiled: is it done? is it in progress? are our robes in process of this washing? There is another place, of which we read in the closing scenes of this book³, which must receive those whose garments are left soiled, left stained, and who die so. *God has no pleasure in our death; but we must turn ourselves*⁴, we must submit to His turning, if we would live. *In the blood of the Lamb*: there, in that death for sin, in that sacrifice, full and perfect, once offered, in that *blood which cleanseth from all sin*⁵, there seek forgiveness, there leave sin, there discard self, there learn

¹ Zech. iii. 3, 4. ² 1 Cor. vi. 11. ³ Rev. xxi. 8.

⁴ Ezek. xviii. 32.

⁵ 1 John i. 7.

to live henceforth not unto yourself, but unto Him which died for you and rose again¹.

2. And let us look, before we separate, not at the earthly life only, but at the heavenly life also, of these who are here shown to us. We have seen whence they came; from washing their robes in the blood of the Lamb; from enduring in His name and strength *the great tribulation* of mortal life; its adversities without, its greater conflicts with temptation, with self, with sins and fears, within. Now let us see whither they come: what is the life of heaven as here disclosed?

(1) It is a life of comfort. No more hunger, no more thirst, no more distress or weariness in *bearing the burden and heat* of an earthly day². God Himself *has wiped away every tear from their eyes*.

(2) It is a life of safety. God Himself has spread His tabernacle over them. They are under his shelter. No evil can approach where He Himself dwells: and they are *keeping the feast*³ not in separate booths of their own, but in the tabernacle, under the tent, of God.

(3) It is a life of thankfulness. They cry with a loud voice, saying, *Salvation to our God!* Our salvation we ascribe to our God and to the Lamb. Our salvation: then we are saved: we speak of it as a thing known and felt to belong to us; and as being our own, we can trace its origin. We see whence it came; we see how, at every step, it was God's doing: could we have made

¹ 2 Cor. v. 15.

² Matt. xx. 12.

³ 1 Cor. v. 8.

ourselves thoughtful? could we have *opened our own understandings to understand the Scriptures*¹, or *our own hearts to attend to the things spoken*²? could we for ourselves have repented of sin, found Christ, gained a new spirit, *wrought righteousness*³, trodden Satan underfoot? These things, and every change and chance and circumstance of life which aided or fostered any one of them, all were God's work : we see it now in the retrospect, as we desired and sought to own it at the time. And as we know the added value which any possession, whether in itself small or great, derives from its being the gift to us of a loved friend, even so is salvation itself made dearer and more precious by the thought of its being the work throughout of God's love and of God's care for us, the purchase of Christ's blood, the fruit of the long patience with us of the Holy Spirit.

(4) It is a life too of service. *They serve Him day and night in His temple*. Heaven would be no heaven to the Christian, if it were a place of selfish repose : it is one of the brightest of all its revelations that it is to be a place of service. But of what nature? Not, like earth's best and highest service, one of many imperfections, one of intermittent zeal, one of frequent drooping and flagging, the service of a corruptible body and of a sinful soul ; but a service like that of Angels, yet with a motive (if it might be so) even more constraining than theirs, a service hearty, constant, perfect, a service of day and of night, a service carried on in God's

¹ Luke xxiv. 45.

² Acts xvi. 14.

³ Heb. xi. 33.

temple, that is, in God's presence, the service of God's priests, ministering not in *holy places made with hands*¹, but in the very scene and presence of His glory. Of the details of that service we presume not to speak: we see it to be a service of praise and thanksgiving; may it not be also one of ministration; of mission and of ministry to others also; even though earth's woes are ended, and *the expectation of the creature*² fulfilled?

(5) But we should ill express the prominent feature of the revelation here presented, if we failed to add, lastly, that the life of the redeemed in heaven is a life of entire dependence upon, devotion to, and union with, the Lamb that was slain. *The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.* He is their Shepherd: *therefore can they lack nothing*³. All that the Saviour was upon earth to the first disciples—their Teacher, their Friend, their Master, their Protector, their Guide, their Upholder, their Restorer—this He is to them: all this, and more. The disciples upon earth scarcely knew Him as their Redeemer, scarcely at all as their Priest, scarcely at all, only just when He was leaving them after Resurrection, as *their Lord and their God*⁴. To be with Him now, knowing Him as we all do by report, as some of us do by contact and experience, would be a widely different thing. O the safety, O the comfort, O the repose and the satisfaction, of being for ever with the Lord, in whose blood we have already washed our robes! There

¹ Heb. ix. 24.

² Rom. viii. 19.

³ Psalm xxiii. 1.

⁴ John xx. 28.

is the point of contact. We must know Him first as our Sacrifice, as the Saviour who, though God, became Man, and in that human nature died for our sins. Then we shall appreciate His other offices. Then to be fed by Him, then to be led by Him, will be indeed the consummation of the joy of heaven. To be with Him in a relation yet more intimate than that of the beloved disciple who *leaned on His breast at supper*¹; to be with Him as not only redeemed, but also inhabited by Him; to be with Him as one cared for upon earth, sought out, rescued, emancipated, sanctified; as one carried safely through life's dangers, soothed under life's sorrows, supported through life's trying and painful end; to be with Him at last, as never before, *face to face*², and yet without ceasing to be with Him heart to heart and spirit to spirit; to be always with Him, and for ever; to do everything, not only for Him, but in His presence, under His eye, and beneath His smile; this will be beyond mere safety, beyond mere comfort, beyond mere service, however constant and perfect; this will be a relation into which no human love ever admitted; this will be a community of life and soul beyond the nearest and dearest of earth's friendships; this will be the ideal to which human sympathy pointed, this the goal of which human love was but the starting-point.

And so we descend from the mount of transfiguration, saying, *It was good for us to be there*³. Good for

¹ John xxi. 20.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

³ Matt. xvii. 4.

us, if it made us yearn after that fulfilment : good for us, if it made us enquire of ourselves whether we are on the way to it : good for us, if it sends us back into earth's common duties, humbler, sadder, wiser men : good for us if it makes us care more for Christ's *little ones*¹ who have not yet strayed as we have ; whom it may be our happiness even to keep from straying, to strengthen against falling, to preoccupy for Him with *the word of His grace*², ere yet the hand of another can have stamped upon them the seal of sin and death.

¹ Matt. xviii. 6.

² Acts xx. 32.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER,
April 28, 1861.

LECTURE XV.

REVELATION VIII. I.

And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

THIS verse forms the conclusion of that series of visions which has engaged our attention for the last three Sundays. We have been witnessing the breaking of those seals which guarded the contents of the book of God's counsels from every created eye. The breaking of each separate seal was followed by the disclosure of some new emblem of judgment. The opening of the sixth seal introduced the well-known imagery of the signs which shall immediately precede the second Advent of the Lord from heaven. But just at the moment when the sight of *the Son of Man Himself coming in the clouds with power and great glory*¹ might have been anticipated, we are interrupted by a two-fold episode or interlude; the vision of the sealing, and the vision of the saints' rest above. In the one we are instructed as to the

¹ Matt. xxiv. 30.

safety of God's elect through the latest and sorest of His earthly judgments upon sin: in the other, we are shown something of the nature of that happiness which is to be theirs when the trials of life are for ever ended. And now one single verse announces to us all that is here to be told of the final consummation. We shall see reason to doubt whether the book itself, the sealed book, the book which the Lamb takes out of the right hand of God, and of which he has now broken each successive seal, is ever read to us; whether its contents are not rather reserved for a future state, to be the subject of satisfying and adoring meditation through the ages of the eternal age. The breaking of each of the first six seals is followed by a new sign, a new scene, a new disclosure: but the consequence of the opening of the seventh seal is not sign nor scene, not speech nor disclosure, but silence: it is the signal for the dropping of the curtain upon the stage of vision, and when it rises again, it is for a new act, with other performers and amidst altered circumstances. The impediments are removed, the scroll is spread, the Divine Reader is prepared: but the actual reading is not for earth but for heaven; they who would understand the whole counsel of God must first lay aside the body, and receive their final *adoption* by becoming *children of the resurrection*¹.

Heaven had resounded with thankful voices ascribing salvation to God and to the Lamb. The surrounding hosts of Angels had echoed the thanksgivings of the

¹ Rom. viii. 23. Luke xx. 36.

saved; and a tumult of praise had filled the ears of him who was permitted to see and to hear all these things. But now there is a change.

And¹ when He, the Lamb, opened the seventh seal, there became (took place) a silence in the heaven as it were during a half-hour. Instead of the reading of the book at that time, there ensued a silence. May we not say that the Prophet himself had not yet attained the condition of one qualified to hear it? that none can hear it in its fulness until, first, he has himself *put on incorruption²*, and until, secondly, the *mystery of God³* is absolutely fulfilled?

But that silence, that silence in heaven, that pause in the disclosures of the eventful day during which St John *was in the Spirit⁴*, has it not other meanings for us besides a mere postponement of full knowledge? Does it not bid us look to the earth, and see the end of man's raging? Does it not bid us look up to heaven, and see the commencement of an eternal calm?

Once so loud, now so silent; do we not see in the words before us a solemn intimation of the futility of all human strivings *against the Lord and against His Christ⁵*? What will man's greatness be in the day when God enters into the judgment? What will then be earthly ambition, earthly power, earthly wealth, and self-indulgence, earthly talent, influence, and genius, when the possessor of each will be on his last trial, and the soul is standing naked before the throne of

¹ Verse 1.

² 1 Cor. xv. 53.

³ Rev. x. 7.

⁴ Rev. i. 10.

⁵ Acts iv. 26.

God? Not for nothing does the *silence in heaven* follow upon the scenes of conquest and discord, of persecution and slaughter, recorded in the 6th chapter, as though to echo and enforce the prophetic announcement, *Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for He is raised up out of His holy habitation*¹. *The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him*².

And for those who on earth have not been among God's enemies but among His servants, is it not a cheering revelation which tells them of a silence at last from earth's contentions, of a *hiding at last in God's pavilion from the strife of tongues*³? Let them practise even now for that sweet silence, by gentleness, by meekness, by patience under provocation; by bowing the head to let the storm pass over it; by keeping the spirit from resentment, and the lips from retort of evil. *In your patience possess ye your souls*⁴.

And now we enter upon a new section of this holy Book: that of the seven trumpets. It extends from the 2nd verse of the 8th chapter to the last verse of the 11th. We shall see some remarkable points of resemblance to the section just concluded; more particularly, the change of subject and character between the fourth and fifth trumpets, and the pause or interlude between the sounding of the sixth trumpet and of the seventh. You will not for a moment think of this section of the prophecy as following chronologically upon the former.

¹ Zech. ii. 13.

² Hab. ii. 20.

³ Psalm xxxi. 20.

⁴ Luke xxi. 19.

It is subsequent to it in the order of disclosure, but not necessarily subsequent to it—certainly not all subsequent to the whole of it—in the order of fulfilment. As the former, so this also had no doubt a minor fulfilment, perhaps many minor fulfilments, in times near to (or in part coincident with) those of St John himself: and certainly the former, no less than this, carries us down to the very end of time. The two visions, briefly distinguishable as that of the seven seals and that of the seven trumpets, are on the whole rather parallel to each other than consecutive. Let me now read to you the first part of this new vision.

And¹ I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God, and there were given to them seven trumpets.

In the 1st chapter of St Luke's Gospel, in the account of the vision of Zacharias in the temple, we read, *And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God².* For the fuller expression here, we may turn, by way of illustration though not of doctrine, to a passage in the Apocryphal book of Tobit. *I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One³.* We shall understand from the form of the language before us, that something of gradation, of order and rank, among the holy Angels, is here faintly indicated. *The seven angels who stand in the presence of God* are distinguished among the *many angels round about the throne*, of whom we read in the

¹ Verse 2.

² Luke i. 19.

³ Tob. xii. 15.

5th chapter that *their number was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands*¹.

The trumpet had various sacred associations in the history and ritual of Israel. In the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai it was the last signal of God's immediate presence. *There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud...And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice*². Hence its solemn application in the New Testament. *The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God*³. The trumpet was the appointed summons to sacrifice and to worship⁴. There was an annual feast of trumpets, on the first day of the seventh month⁵. The trumpet was the signal of war; announcing its approach, and summoning to defence⁶. But various as were the Old Testament associations, all sacred and solemn, with the sounding of the trumpet, there was one, and (so far as I remember) one only, with the particular combination here found, that of *seven* trumpets. In the 6th chapter of the book of Joshua, we read the following directions for the siege of the first city which opposed Israel after the passage of the Jordan. *The Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all*

¹ Rev. v. 11.

² Exod. xix. 16, 19.

³ 1 Thess. iv. 16.

⁴ Num. x. 10.

⁵ Num. xxix. 1.

⁶ Ezek. xxxiii. 3. 1 Sam. xiii. 3.

ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him¹. And a minute description follows of the manner in which the command was obeyed and the promise of victory fulfilled. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days².

This passage of the Old Testament will be found to contain the key to the prophecy now before us. You will bear in mind the leading ideas: there is a hostile city, walled, guarded, and full of armed men: God's people are set to capture it; its capture is essential to their conquest of Canaan; yet not a blow is to be struck by any arm of flesh: the ark of God, the repository of His law, the symbol of His presence, is to be carried in solemn procession, amongst the ridicule (we may well imagine) of the hosts which looked on from that city's walls; and the only sound which is to break the silence, during the first six days of this strange ceremonial, is to be that of seven trumpets entrusted to seven priests who are to sound them day by day imme-

¹ Josh. vi. 2—5.

² Heb. xi. 30.

diately before the ark of God's covenant : on the seventh day the procession is seven times repeated, and at the seventh circuit, at a louder blast of the trumpet, the people give a shout, and the city walls, crowded perhaps with mocking foes, fall prostrate at the invader's feet. Bear these particulars in mind : and if it should appear that, in this prophecy on which we to-night enter, *the Israel of God*¹ is taught to expect a like but far more glorious triumph over the combined force of a greater and more terrible enemy, and to hear in each blast of the symbolic trumpet a promise and an instalment of victory, at least we shall say that the interpretation is simple and Scriptural, though we may refrain from pointing the finger at particular items of fulfilment in the past, or gratifying a human curiosity by detailed prognostications of fulfilment in the future.

*And*² *another angel came and stood to (at) the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he might give it to the prayers of all the saints on to, throwing it upon, the golden altar which was before (in presence or in front of) the throne. And*³ *there went up the smoke of the incense for, to give sweetness to, the prayers of the saints, out of the hand of the angel, before (in the presence of) God.*

At the opening of the fifth seal we had an altar introduced without further explanation⁴. That was the altar of burnt-offering, which stood before the door of the tabernacle or temple itself. Here again we have an

¹ Gal. vi. 16.

² Verse 3.

³ Verse 4.

⁴ Rev. vi. 9.

altar spoken of: but now it is the golden altar of incense, which was one part of the furniture of the holy place; of the outer division, that is, of the temple; the same altar which we read of in the opening of St Luke's Gospel: *there appeared unto him (Zacharias) an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense*¹. We before remarked, in reference to the other altar, how easy is the transition from the scenery of God's presence in heaven to that of His temple on earth: the readers of this Book would ask no explanation and no justification of the introduction of one or the other of these altars amongst images in many respects incongruous.

You observe that in the Authorized Version the incense is said to be offered *with the prayers of all saints*; and in the following verse its smoke is said to have come *with the prayers of the saints*, and so ascended up before God. There can be little doubt that the more correct form of the expression is the one before read to you. *There was given to him much incense, that he might give it to the prayers of all the saints on to*, that is, to be offered upon, *the golden altar*. The incense was used to give a sweet scent to that fire-offering upon which it was thrown. When the Angel has incense given him to throw upon the prayers of the saints, it indicates that those prayers may now rise with acceptance to the throne of God; in other words, that the time for actually offering them, because the time when God will answer them, is now fully come. And then there goes up the smoke of the incense out of the Angel's hand, *for* (that is, to give

¹ Luke i. 11.

a sweet scent to) those prayers which before were lying as it were savourless because premature.

I need not say one word to caution any one here present against a perverse misapprehension of the office which is thus assigned to the Angel. We are looking upon a vision, a vision full of glorious meaning, but not to be rigidly pressed into separate particulars of doctrine. We Christians know of *one* and but one *Mediator*¹. The Angel's part is not one of intercession or of mediation: he comes simply to testify that God's time is come, and that the prayers of the saints for deliverance and for victory have been heard and shall now be answered.

*And*² now the angel has taken the censer, and he filled it from the fire of the altar, and cast the contents upon the earth. The censer had fulfilled its first office, that of scenting and perfuming the prayers of the saints: now it has a ministry of judgment; it is filled afresh with live coal taken from the altar of incense, and emptied upon the earth below. *And there arose thunders and lightnings and voices and an earthquake.* These are the premonitions of judgment.

*And*³ the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves that they might sound; raised the trumpets, and stood in readiness to blow them. *And*⁴ the first sounded; and there became, that is, came, or followed, hail and fire mixed in blood, and it was cast upon the earth: and the third part of the earth was burned up, and the third part of the trees was burned up, and all green

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5.

² Verse 5.

³ Verse 6.

⁴ Verse 7.

grass was burned up. The figures employed correspond in some degree with the incidents of the plague of hail, when, as it is written, *the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground...So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous...And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field*¹. Here, in the vision before us, the hail and the fire are present, but they are now *mingled in blood*; a new and frightful element, showing that something more is indicated than a mere storm, however wild and preternatural in its character.

*And*² *the second angel sounded; and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea; and the third part of the sea became blood, and*³ *there died the third part of the creatures that were in the sea, even those which had lives, and the third part of the ships were destroyed.*

The consequences of the first trumpet affected the earth: the operation of the second is upon the sea. Again there is a similarity to one of the plagues inflicted of old upon Egypt, when *all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood, and the fish that was in the river died...and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt*⁴. The figure of the burning mountain is found first in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, where, among the denunciations against Babylon, we read, *Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the Lord...*

¹ Exod. ix. 23—25.

² Verse 8.

³ Verse 9.

⁴ Exod. vii. 20, 21.

*and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain*¹. And the limited operation of this as of the other judgments here recorded finds a striking illustration in the prophet Amos, who says, *Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me: and behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part*². The violence of the convulsion denoted by the casting of a great mountain into the sea is strongly indicated to us in the well-known words of our Lord, illustrating the omnipotence of faith, *If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done*³. It is spoken of as the most obviously impossible of all things to natural strength; as lying within the reach of that strength alone which faith draws down for us from God.

*And*⁴ *the third angel sounded; and there fell out of the heaven a great star burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the springs of the waters. And*⁵ *the name of the star is called Wormwood, from the bitter nauseous herb which bears that name; and the third part of the waters became (turned) into wormwood, and many of mankind died from (in consequence of) the waters, because they were embittered.*

The second was a plague affecting the sea; this is upon spring and river waters. It is one of the judg-

¹ Jer. li. 25.

² Amos vii. 4.

³ Matt. xxi. 21.

⁴ Verse 10.

⁵ Verse 11.

ments predicted by the prophet Jeremiah; *Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink*¹.

*And*² *the fourth angel sounded; and there was smitten the third part of the sun, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, that the third part of them might be darkened, and the day might not display (cause to shine) its third part, and the night likewise; that the brightness of the sun by day and of the moon by night might be diminished by one third of each. We may be reminded here of the plague of darkness over the land of Egypt*³; but you will not fail to notice the peculiarity attending each of these four inflictions, that it is a limited judgment, not affecting the whole of any one of its objects, and therefore not yet final.

*And*⁴ *I saw, and I heard a single eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a mighty voice, Woe, woe, woe to them that dwell on the earth, from (in consequence of) the remaining voices of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!*

At this ominous point we must break off our exposition for this time. It is well if any curiosity has been awakened as to the things of God, as to His Word, and as to His coming judgments. We have much yet to say on the voices of these trumpets. We have scarcely touched as yet upon their significance. It was necessary, in order to a just view, to take the first four at least together. You will have noticed that

¹ Jer. ix. 15.

² Verse 12.

³ Exod. x. 21.

⁴ Verse 13.

they form a connected group, and that they are strongly marked off—if only by the triple cry of the woe-foreboding eagle, but not less by their own subject and character—from the three which follow. They are exhibited to us, in form at least, as God's judgments upon inanimate nature, and upon mankind only mediately, only as affected by inanimate nature or using it for His purposes. But I must not anticipate.

For to-day I must bring to a close, with a brief word or two of solemn application, our meditations upon this book of Holy Scripture.

I. I would say first, let this passage teach us what prayer is. We naturally think of prayer rather as it leaves earth than as it enters heaven. We are conscious, painfully, often bitterly, conscious, of its many hindrances, its sad imperfections, its inherent sins. It is useful to think of these things, and to seek counsel from man and help from God against them. But amongst these aids, divine and human, to the exercise of prayer, let us not fail to place that one with which this passage provides us; the thought of the arrival of prayer (if I might so express it) in the presence-chamber above. There is great force in those words of comfort addressed to Cornelius, *Thy prayers...are come up for a memorial before God*¹. These poor thoughts and words of ours, with which we present ourselves, in the house of prayer or in the secret place of our own dwelling, before the face of God, have a meaning, have a vitality, they do not *return into our own bosom*², they do not, at least

¹ Acts x. 4.

² Psalm xxxv. 13.

they need not, drop back wingless upon the earth ; no, they quit us, they go up, they reach heaven, they are regarded there as an offering, there is a special altar for them there, and it stands in front of the very throne of God. And if at times they lie there on the heavenly altar as though disregarded and unheard, if no answer seems to come, if we rise from prayer and fancy ourselves unprofited, let this passage teach us how this is: the prayers are only waiting for the incense to be sprinkled on them, the incense which God provides, the incense which He will surely provide for them when the right time comes, and which will make them at last *an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice* seasonable and therefore *acceptable to Himself*¹. *There was given him much incense, that he might give it to the prayers of all the saints* for their offering *on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of that incense went up for the prayers of the saints*, that is, to render them availing, *before the face of God*. Only take heed that your prayers be offered through the one mediation of Christ the Lamb of God, and then *pray on and faint not*², and assuredly the time of their acceptance and the time of your answer will come.

And does not this passage give us what I may indeed call a formidable idea of the consequences of Christian prayers? The same censer which has just been used to sprinkle the sweet incense upon the prayers of saints, is instantly afterwards scattering fire upon the

¹ Phil. iv. 18.

² Luke xviii. 1.

earth, and there are *thunders and lightnings and voices and an earthquake*, and then begins that series of judgments of which the issue is the last end. How exactly is this the aspect of prayer presented in the Parable of the Unjust Judge. *And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them*¹? The final answer to Christian prayer, the fulfilment of the cry uttered from generation to generation, *Thy kingdom come*², is the discomfiture and destruction of all evil; sin first of all, and with it all those who have determinately taken part with sin. Yes, the prayer of a Christian man may *be set forth*, as the Psalmist says, *before God as incense*³; but it returns back upon earth in the shape of a fire to consume evil. Let us take good heed that we hate our sins, and struggle against them, and never take part with them; and then, when sin is judged⁴, we shall not be condemned with it, but for ever set free in that perfect liberty which is the very rest of heaven.

2. Lastly, let the text itself suggest to us the advantage of an occasional pause and stillness. *There was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour*. I speak not now of the intended meaning of the words in connection with their context: that we have looked into: but I say that they have a just application derivable from their very sound and form. The world lies too close round all of us: it is a world of shadow, not of substance; but it loudly asserts its own reality and per-

¹ Luke xviii. 7.

² Matt. vi. 10.

³ Psalm cxli. 2.

⁴ 1 Cor. xi. 32.

manence, and we are prone, for peace sake, or else under the influence of its false boastings, to say even as others, that the world is all. Much do we all need seasons of reflection, half-hours of silence, that we may at last *commune with our own hearts and be still*¹. Yet how fearful are we of entering into that close communion with the soul within us! How glad are we to drown its remonstrances, to lull its misgivings! Who is there of us all, who sees himself indeed as God sees him? May God make us willing so to *judge ourselves* that *we may not be judged*²! Be brave to face yourselves; be diligent to use well and watchfully every season of solitude and seclusion; that so, when the time comes that you must die alone, and be judged alone, and alone enter into eternity, you may find yourself in reality *not alone, because your Saviour and your Father is with you*³!

¹ Psalm iv. 4.² 1 Cor. xi. 31.³ John xvi. 32.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER,

May 5, 1861.

LECTURE XVI.

REVELATION IX. 12.

One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

FOUR trumpets have already sounded: three yet remain. The trumpets are signals of war: *the seven trumpets*, to the ear of an Israelite, would recall the idea of a hostile city, compassed about by the army of God's people, and destined to a final overthrow, not by *an arm of flesh*¹, but by the special intervention and interposition of God. We can scarcely err in seeing thus much in that section of the Book of Revelation which is now before us. Like all God's words, it has a sound of terror in it, and a sound of mercy. *It was a cloud and darkness to them*, to the enemies of God—thus was it written of the pillar of the divine presence in the passage of the Red Sea—*but it gave light by night to these*²; the light of guid-

¹ 2 Chron. xxxii. 8.

² Exod. xiv. 20.

ance, the light of comfort, the light of hope, to *the Israel of God*¹, *His people, His chosen*². In the days of St John the Church of Christ was a little army compassing a mighty stronghold, *a city great and walled up to heaven*³, peopled with gigantic powers, and ready to laugh to scorn its few and feeble assailants. How hopeless must it have seemed to them to maintain the struggle! how improbable that the faith of Christ could even exist amidst such perils, much less conquer against such odds! But the vision of the seven trumpets was full of hope, full of comfort, for them. It bade them remember the siege of Jericho in the days of old, when by faith alone the victory was won, without one blow struck or one engine aimed by man. Even so should it be in that greater and more magnificent war by which *the kingdoms of the world* are to be made at last *the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ*⁴. In each successive generation the Church is to be listening for the note of that sacred trumpet, which is her assurance that *the battle is the Lord's*⁵; that He, in nature and in providence as well as in grace, is working and warring; that He is purposing and acting, He ruling and overruling, in all the affairs of men; and that in the end, when *the set time is come*⁶, His people will find themselves triumphant, *not by might nor by power*⁷ of theirs, but by the power and Spirit of the Lord of hosts Himself.

¹ Gal. vi. 16.² Isai. xliii. 20.³ Deut. i. 28.⁴ Rev. xi. 15.⁵ 1 Sam. xvii. 47.⁶ Psalm cii. 13.⁷ Zech. iv. 6.

We paused, a month ago, at the break between the sounding of the fourth trumpet and of the fifth. We have read the account of the sweet incense being put to the prayers of the saints, lying till then as it were dormant upon the golden altar before the throne. That was the sign that the time was now come for their being answered. And we have read how the very censer, which had just been used to give fragrance to the prayers of the saints, was immediately afterwards employed to scatter fire from off the same altar upon the earth. Prayer has two aspects. It brings an answer of peace to the offerer: it brings an answer of judgment upon the world of evil. *Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them*¹? We have read also of the consequences of the sounding of the first four trumpets: first of the plague of *hail and fire mingled in blood*, destroying the vegetation of the earth; secondly, of the *great burning mountain cast into the sea*, with ruin to life and to navigation; thirdly, of the *great star thrown from heaven*, carrying fatal bitterness into spring and river waters; fourthly, of the *smiting of sun and moon and stars*, so that the third part of each was darkened. And we just reached the verse read again as this night's text, in which we are told that, terrible as had been the inflictions prefigured by the first four blasts of the Angels' trumpets, there would be a woe greater and more fearful still in the three which are to follow.

¹ Luke xviii. 7.

To-night, before I attempt interpretation, I shall read to you the two passages which make up the contents of the 9th chapter, and which bring us to the margin of that double episode or interlude which, in the case of the trumpets as before of the seals, postpones the arrival of the seventh judgment, of the final catastrophe. You will follow me from the 1st verse of the 9th chapter.

And¹ the fifth angel sounded; and I saw a star fallen out of the heaven upon the earth; and there was given to it, or rather (as the fact shows) to him, the key of the well of the abyss.

In St Luke's account of the miracle of healing the man possessed with devils, we read that *they*, the evil spirits, *besought Him*, Jesus, *that He would not command them to go out (away) into the deep²*. The expression there is the one here used. *The deep* is *the abyss*, the bottomless pit of hell, the home of the devil and his angels. It was the natural place (if we might so speak) for the evil spirits, expelled from man, to be sent to; and they were eager to avoid it. In the passage now before us the figurative representation is that hell, the abode of the evil spirits, lies below the earth, and communicates with it by an opening like the mouth of a well, having upon it a cover closed and locked. And now there is seen a star, the Scriptural emblem of a power or ruler, not falling, but already *fallen, out of the heaven upon the earth*, to which,

¹ Verse 1.

² Luke viii. 31.

or to whom, the key of this cover is entrusted, that he may unlock and open it. We shall expect under this figure the description of some manifestation of evil, of some working of diabolical, of Satanic, agency, which has before been coerced and suppressed.

And¹ he opened the well of the abyss; and there went up a smoke out of the well, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun was darkened, and the air, by (in consequence of) the smoke of the well. And² out of the smoke there came forth locusts upon the earth; and there was given to them power (authority) as the scorpions of the earth have power. And³ it was bidden them that they shall not injure the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, except, but only, the men whoever they be that have not the seal of God on their foreheads: referring to the vision of the sealing in the 7th chapter. And⁴ it was given them that they should not kill them, but that they shall be tortured five months; indicating by the broken number, like the third part so often repeated in the 8th chapter, or like the ten days of the 2nd chapter⁵, that even this woe is not yet final. It is to be a repeated, reiterated, protracted torture; not giving the relief of death, but keeping men alive in their misery. And the torture of, inflicted by, them is like the torture of a scorpion when it has struck, or wounded, a man. And⁶ in those days mankind shall seek death, and they shall not find it; and they shall long to die, and death flees

¹ Verse 2.² Verse 3.³ Verse 4.⁴ Verse 5.⁵ Rev. ii. 10.⁶ Verse 6.

from them. A frequent figure in Scripture for a state of utter distress and wretchedness. *Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures*¹?

*And*² *the likenesses, or forms, of the locusts were like horses made ready unto war; and upon their heads were as it were crowns like gold; and their faces were as faces of men (human beings;)* *and*³ *they had hair as women's hair; and their teeth were as of lions; and*⁴ *they had breastplates as iron breastplates; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of, drawn by, many horses running to war. And*⁵ *they have tails like those of scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power (authority) to injure mankind during five months; having*⁶ *(and they have) as king over them an angel of the abyss; his name in the Hebrew Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue he hath a name Apollyon, the destroyer. The*⁷ *one Woe is gone: behold, there cometh yet two Woes after these things.*

The imagery of this passage is drawn from the plague of locusts, described in the 10th chapter of the book of Exodus. We have another and in some respects fuller account of that fearful infliction in the prophecies of Joel. We can ill conceive in our country the horrors involved in the appearance of a swarm of those devouring insects. You have heard the description of it

¹ Job iii. 20, 21.

² Verse 7.

³ Verse 8.

⁴ Verse 9.

⁵ Verse 10.

⁶ Verse 11.

⁷ Verse 12.

by St John : now listen to a few words from that of the Prophet Joel. *A nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion... The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the Lord: The priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn¹...A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness...The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap...as a strong people set in battle array...They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war...The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining².*

And³ the sixth angel sounded; and I heard a single voice out of the four horns of the golden altar which is before (in presence of) God, even one saying⁴ to the sixth angel, he who had the trumpet, Loose the four angels that are bound at (near) the great river Euphrates. And⁵ there were loosed the four angels who had been made ready unto the hour and day and month and year, that is, the exact time fixed in God's counsels, that they should slay the third part of mankind. And⁶ the number of the armies of the horse (cavalry) were two myriads of myriads, twenty thousand times ten thousand, two hundred millions: I

¹ Joel i. 6, 9.

² Verse 13.

³ Joel ii. 3—5, 7, 10.

⁴ Verse 14.

⁵ Verse 15.

⁶ Verse 16.

heard the number of them. And¹ thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those who sat upon them, having breastplates of fire and jacinth, a stone the colour of the dark purple hyacinth, and brimstone; and the heads of the horses were as heads of lions, and out of their mouths goeth forth fire and smoke and brimstone. From² (by) these three plagues were slain the third part of mankind, by (in consequence of) the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which goeth forth out of their mouths. For³ the power (authority) of the horses is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads, and through them they injure. And⁴ the rest of mankind, who were not slain through these plagues, repented not out of, so as to leave, the works of their hands, that they should not worship the evil spirits, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk: and⁵ they repented not out of their murders, nor out of their sorceries, nor out of their fornication, nor out of their thefts.

Some of those who hear me to-night will remember that I said at the beginning of this course of Lectures that I should often have occasion to speak doubtfully as to the meaning of portions of this Book. I did not regard that as a reason for avoiding the Book altogether. Rather does it exercise care and patience, humility and expectation, and in the same degree foster in us some of the highest qualities required for the study of God's Word in all its parts.

¹ Verse 17.

² Verse 18.

³ Verse 19.

⁴ Verse 20.

⁵ Verse 21.

The interpretation of the passage now before us is an example of this uncertainty. I can but give you the result of my own anxious study of it, aided by such helps as I possess; and briefly say, in doing so, that other persons have been led to other and very various conclusions.

In five out of the six visions which occur in this section of the Book of Revelation, natural objects are introduced; trees and grass, sea and ships, rivers and fountains, sun and moon and stars, and then the devouring locusts. Are we to take these things literally? Are we to say that judgments are predicted having these natural objects for their scope and import? The answer is, that in every one of these visions we have something introduced, some instrument or some agency, wholly supernatural; and not only this, but wholly unsuitable to the description if restricted to natural objects and taken in a literal sense. Thus, to take a single example, *the great mountain burning with fire and cast into the sea* at once removes the second of these judgments out of the field of nature, and prevents our understanding of the sea and ships literally that result which is thus figuratively and typically brought to pass.

The trumpet is a martial instrument. The whole group of judgments falling under the section of the trumpets has war for its general subject. A series of fearful images is introduced, of which the burden is, over and over again, the prediction contained in the discourse of our Lord, so often referred to, in the 24th chapter of St Matthew and the 13th of St Mark. *Nation shall rise*

*against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars*¹.

War is one of God's own judgments upon the earth. It is so described in the well-known prophecy of Ezekiel. *I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land*². It is difficult for us, in a time of peace, to enter into the anguish and desolation through which men pass when that peace is for them broken. We must not wish to be able to realize this. Rather ought we to thank God day by day for allowing us in this country to live on without experience of this scourge of nations. But no doubt our inexperience personally and nationally of the disasters and miseries which war brings into families and into human hearts makes such passages as that now under consideration less vivid to us, less solemn, and less impressive. And it inclines me to pass more rapidly than I should otherwise have done through the detailed descriptions here presented.

There is first seen a great and fiery hailstorm, typifying the desolations caused by that plague of war which is ever and anon in the course of centuries breaking forth anew to agitate, afflict, and enfeeble nations at enmity with God. Those who look carefully into the figures of Scripture, and throw the light of the Old Testament upon the New, find in the trees and grass, upon which that first judgment falls, emblems of those who are lofty and of those who are humble in station; of the great men of the earth, and of the people. In like man-

¹ Matt. xxiv. 6, 7.

² Ezek. xiv. 17.

ner, in the second judgment, the mountain is the type of a kingdom; the burning mountain of a kingdom upon which the fire of judgment is lighting: the sea, of the world and its nations; the sea becoming blood, of a wide-spread loss of human life by the sword and its consequences. So again, in the third judgment, the star is a ruler; the burning star, a ruler on fire with the lust of ambition, conquest, and vengeance: the rivers are the emblem of affluence and of national prosperity; and their bitterness, of the poisoning as it were of the springs of such prosperity. And the fourth judgment, with its darkening of two-thirds of the lights of heaven, indicates long periods of distress and anguish, not yet indeed the last and most permanent of all, but still seasons protracted and repeated: *if one look unto the earth, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof*¹.

For the fifth judgment, that of the plague of locusts, we have an inspired interpreter in the prophet Joel. He has already used that terrible scourge as a type of hostile invasion; describing the inroad of the Assyrian host under Sennacherib in figures borrowed from those insect swarms. In the passage before us many expressions, as we have seen, are precisely the same with those of the Old Testament Prophet. But there are some which belong wholly to this Book. There is the opening of the bottomless pit by the instrumentality of a star in human likeness. The star is again perhaps a ruler. It

¹ Isai. v. 30.

is thrown from heaven, to indicate the judicial character of that which follows: for heaven is throughout as much *the seat of judgment as the throne of grace*¹. The opening of the pit is followed by that rising smoke, the product of the fire of hell, which denotes the diffusion on earth of the diabolical spirit of cruelty and hatred. Out of this smoke come the locusts: out of the diabolical spirit diffused on earth come those desolating hordes of combatants which resemble the fatal locust-swarms, in their multitude, in their suddenness, and in their devastation. To the well-known traits of the locust is added also, to complete the horror, the malice of the scorpion. To the likeness, marked also in Joel, of horses and chariots rushing to battle, is added here the crown which betokened sovereignty over the conquered, and the long hair, as of women, which amongst ancient nations was the sign of an uncivilized and barbarian race. But first and last stands the sign of the origination of this woe from Satanic influence, and its management throughout by Satanic agency.

And thus we pass to the sixth judgment. A voice is heard from among the four horns of that golden altar on which lie for sacrifice the prayers of saints. It is the cry of God's oppressed people on earth which brings down this judgment upon the world of their oppressors². The judgment itself consists in setting free four Angels hitherto bound; in giving scope, that is, to the operation of a particular agency thus far restrained by God's longsuffering

¹ Psalm cxxii. 5 (Prayer-Book Version). Heb. iv. 16.

² Exod. iii. 9.

towards *the world of the ungodly*¹. The Angels are four in number, in allusion to the four corners of the earth, or the four winds, to express the world-wide character of the judgments foretold. The place of their binding first and then of their loosing is the river Euphrates; marked in the Old Testament as the boundary between the kingdom of Israel and the kingdoms of the East, whether Assyrian, Chaldean, or Persian; as the limit from beyond which came the hosts of invading nations to make war upon the nations and upon the city of God. The Euphrates is thus used as a general emblem of the seat of God's hosts of war gathered for attack upon an unbelieving or apostate world. Just as we read in the 13th chapter of the Prophet Isaiah: *The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people: a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the Lord of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the Lord, and the weapons of His indignation, to destroy the whole land*². Who the enemy is, against whom the hosts of the Lord are thus mustered, may be gathered from the 20th and 21st verses. He is the world sunk in sin, and therefore hostile to the Church.

And we shall understand that the predictions of these two chapters, like those contained in the section of the seven seals, are manifold, not single, in their fulfilment. Wherever war has been employed, under God's overruling Providence, to humble pride and to break up, as

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 5.

² Isai. xiii. 4, 5.

it has done again and again, overgrown and overbearing powers, there have these chapters had an accomplishment again and again; and each separate accomplishment has been in its turn a prediction and prognostication of the greatest accomplishment and of the last. Those hordes of invading barbarians which broke up the monster Empire of Rome, and out of whose conquests Modern Europe eventually grew, were one fulfilment—they were not the only fulfilment—of the prophecies on which we have dwelt to-night. Never were the figures of the locust-swarms, with their teeth as of lions and their hair as of women, more strikingly exemplified than in those irruptions. But they did not exhaust the prophecies before us. When the mighty power of the French Empire at the beginning of this century was broken up by a coalition as of God's hosts mustering for the battle against human pride and human ambition, then was there a new fulfilment, itself prophetic of another and another until the last of all. The words of God are manifold in their application, just because they deal not with instances only, but with principles.

But it is time that I should recall your thoughts from general and historical matters to such as are individual and personal.

1. And amongst these I must place first the indications here given of the connection between earth and hell. We have often had occasion in commenting upon this Book of Scripture to speak of the nearness to us of heaven, and of the world in which God is. To-night we are reminded that if men will not have heaven open to

them, if they will break off the connection between earth and heaven, they must expect to have that between earth and hell opened. Man and his earth lies between two worlds of spirit, and one or the other must be actively operative upon him. Little do they know of the things of God who affect to doubt the existence of either; to whom the idea of spirit and spiritual agency is a visionary and unreal thing. As heaven is above us, separated from our view but by a screen or veil (I might almost say) of earthly atmosphere; so is hell beneath us, and it has an aperture upon earth, always existing, and sometimes unlocked and opened. We ourselves, with all our boasted independence, and freedom of will and action, are strangely influenced oftentimes, both for good and evil, by powers and agencies not our own; powers of the world beneath, or else, by God's mercy, powers of the world above us¹. And between these two unseen worlds we live and move generally unconscious. We think that our own world, the world of sense and of time, is all in all. We neither fear the infection of the unseen world of evil, nor desire and seek the communion of the unseen world of good. My brethren, the belief in either of these would be good for us. We greatly want seriousness, and we greatly want decision. We have no sense of danger. We hope to drift through life, and to find ourselves at last in a painless state, if not in a world of glory. It is this idleness, this dreaminess, of soul and spirit, which makes the Lord's Table empty, and suffers

¹ Heb. vi. 5.

so many of us to go on calling Christ *Lord, Lord*, without once setting ourselves to *do the things which He says*¹.

2. And there is a special lesson contained for us in the closing verses of the 9th chapter, which I the more willingly notice because it is in exact harmony with the teaching of this day's Gospel. *The rest of the men, which were not killed by these plagues, yet repented not of the works of their hands. If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent*; such is the idea of human nature: but the answer is ready, *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead*². God's visitations pass lightly over souls asleep in sin. They miss altogether their scope and purpose. They ascribe them all to other causes than His will or His act. War itself with all its terrible consequences they ascribe to human motive, and they never see in it the scourge of God. Is it not so with all God's providences? Which of us has not lived through a thousand of them, and never seen, never noticed, never given heed to one? Death, sudden death, coming into our street or into our home, which of us has not hardened his heart again, after a very brief pause, against lessons which this ought to teach, and sinned on as before? O the desperate hardness of the human heart! What can melt it, save omnipotent grace? I wish I could hope that some of those who hear me to-night were deeply impressed with their own obdurate impenitence. It is not all, but it is something, that we be so. I am sure it

¹ Luke vi. 46.

² Luke xvi. 30, 31.

is one of the lessons of life; one of its surest, saddest, and most solemn lessons. How is it, we say to ourselves, and well may we say it, that I do not feel as I ought this stroke of chastisement; this loss, this anxiety, this sickness, this death? I feel that I ought to feel, but I feel it not. Happy they who from this lesson as to their own hardness draw the right inference as to their need of God's grace; and not only draw the inference, for that perhaps we all do, but also act upon it, by calling upon God to break in pieces *the nether millstone*¹ of their heart, and make them repentant, believing, humble, earnest men!

3. My brethren, I pause to-night in fear lest we be *hearers of the Word* of God, *and not doers*². I tremble lest we be too much separating the two things, hearing and doing. How dreadful will it be for us, ministers and people alike, if with a certain degree of interest in the disclosures of the Word of God, a certain pleasure in listening to its interpretation, and even in taking part in the worship which accompanies it, we be combining a thoroughly worldly and careless life; much more a life of self-indulgence, folly, or sin! But stop short of this; say only, a life of indecision, of *halting between two opinions*³, of faith in Christ and of compromise with evil. Not in displeasure, dear brethren, but in some disappointment, some sadness, some sorrow, because we think that our Lord Himself, looking upon us from heaven, must feel this for us, would we urge you, and press it also

¹ Job xli. 24.

² James i. 22.

³ 1 Kings xviii. 21.

upon ourselves, that we rest not in the condition of the wayside, of the shallow, of the thorn-choked and world-encumbered hearer, but anxiously pray and labour that we may in deed and in truth *bring some fruit to perfection*¹. The judgments of God, in this world and in eternity, are to light upon those men *who have not the seal of God in their foreheads*. Let us be *jealous over ourselves with godly jealousy*² that that mark be ours! Then shall *all things*, however outwardly, however extensively disastrous, *work together for our good*³. *Who is he*, and what is that, *that will harm you, if ye be followers*⁴ of the Lamb that was slain? God grant to us in this place a work real, substantial, and abiding; an impression heart-deep; souls penetrated with His grace, and lives transformed by His power!

¹ Luke viii. 14.² 2 Cor. xi. 2.³ Rom. viii. 28.⁴ 1 Pet. iii. 13.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
June 2, 1861.

LECTURE XVII.

REVELATION X. 8.

And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.

WE are now in the pause between the sixth trumpet and the seventh. It has already been noticed that this pause or interlude, like that of the 7th chapter between the opening of the sixth and of the seventh seal, has two parts; the one occupying the 10th chapter, and the other the first thirteen verses of the 11th. It is with the former that we are concerned this evening.

We have read of judgments of every description befalling the world of the ungodly. Is there to be any end of these things? Are they to continue, are they to be for ever repeating themselves, generation after generation, without limit and without change? The answer to this question will be found in the chapter now before us. A further question will arise, as to the condition of

God's servants in a world upon which His judgments are falling and to fall; as to their position, duty, power, and hope; which will meet its reply in the section which follows.

And¹ I saw another mighty angel going down out of the heaven, with a cloud cast about him; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his countenance was as the sun, and his feet were as pillars of fire; and² having in his hand a little roll opened.

Another mighty angel. The same combination of words, *a strong or mighty angel*, occurred in the 5th chapter. And there also it is found in connection with a roll or book. *I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book and to loose its seven seals³? A mighty angel:* and here, *another mighty angel.*

In other respects there is a wide difference between the two passages. We are not to imagine that the roll, or book, is the same there and here. The form of the word is different. Here the diminutive form is used with emphasis. There it was a roll: here it is expressly called *a little roll*. There the roll is seen strongly sealed: here it is already opened. There *no one is found worthy to open or even to look upon it⁴*; the mighty Angel can but make proclamation concerning it in a tone of doubt and even of despair, *Who is worthy to open the book?* here an Angel holds it, holds it open in his hand, and the Prophet who sees the vision is bidden

¹ Verse 1.

² Verse 2.

³ Rev. v. 2.

⁴ Rev. v. 3.

to take it out of the Angel's hand. The other, the roll of the 5th chapter, was the book of God's counsels as a whole; the time for its communication is not yet; when its seventh seal is broken, *then shall the end come*¹; and they who are privileged to read it must be already not on earth, but in heaven: this, the little roll of the 10th chapter, is one particular portion or section of prophecy, which is given to St John, while still in the body, to communicate, however enigmatically, to the Church on earth.

But though the little book here brought into view contains not the whole but only a particular part of God's counsels, there is no lack of importance or of majesty in the circumstances of its revelation. The Angel who holds it is *clothed in a cloud*; and has upon his head the rainbow, that well-known image of God's faithfulness, and in particular of His reviving and restoring mercy after a season of severe judgment; and his face shines as the sun, and his feet are as pillars of fire for majesty and strength; *and he set his right foot on the sea, and the left on the earth*, as though he would assert the right of Him from whom he came to an absolute and unbounded sovereignty over every part of creation; *and*² *he cried with a great voice even as a lion roareth*. *And when he thus cried, the seven thunders spake (uttered) their own*, that is, their several distinctive, *voices*. *And*³ *when the seven thunders spake*, had spoken, *I was about to write: and I heard a voice out of the heaven, say-*

¹ Matt. xxiv. 14.² Verse 3.³ Verse 4.

ing, Seal the things which the seven thunders spake, and write them not.

The expression *the seven thunders* does not, I believe, occur elsewhere in Scripture. Thunder is emblematical of the voice of God; what St John heard was some utterance of the mind and purpose and will of God: and the selection of the number seven, as a complete and a sacred number, is one which we have frequently noticed already in this Book. We may perhaps recall the expression of the 29th Psalm; *it is the glorious God that maketh the thunder*¹: and again that of the 12th chapter of St John, where we read that when *there came a voice from heaven* in answer to the prayer of Jesus, *Father, glorify Thy name; the people that stood by and heard it said that it thundered; others said, An angel spake to Him*².

Whatever on this occasion the divine voice uttered, St John was not allowed to write it for the immediate instruction of the Church. He was charged to seal up, instead of opening, that which the seven thunders had spoken in his hearing. It is a vain curiosity therefore which prompts any one to speculate upon these mysterious sounds.

*And*³ *the angel whom I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to the heaven, and*⁴ *swore in (by) Him who liveth unto the ages of the ages, who created the heaven and the things that are in it, and the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and*

¹ Psalm xxix. 3 (Prayer-Book Version). ² John xii. 28, 29.

³ Verse 5.

⁴ Verse 6.

the things that are in it, that there shall no longer be time, that is, loss of time, delay, postponement, but¹ that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, whenever he is about to sound with the trumpet, then was finished—it is expressed retrospectively, as it will appear after the event, and to denote the certainty of that event as though already witnessed—*then was finished*, that is, then is destined to be finished, *the mystery of God, as He evangelized His own servants the prophets*; that is, according to *the glad tidings²* which He conveyed to, and then by His servants the prophets.

The mystery of God is God's secret. A *mystery* in Scripture does not mean something which cannot be understood or explained; it is never applied to such matters, for example, as the origin of evil, or the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity; it does mean a secret, but then a secret may be told, and when told is no mystery. *The mystery or secret of God* means therefore the whole of His plan and of His counsel concerning this earth in its present state of discipline and of imperfection; all that God purposes to do upon it and towards it, even till that which we read of as *the time of the end³*, the close of this His last dispensation, and the introduction of that *new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness⁴*.

The statement then is that a time is fixed in God's counsels for the completion and termination of the present mixed state; that the sounding of the seventh trumpet, according to the figurative language of this portion

¹ Verse 7.

² Luke viii. 1.

³ Dan. xii. 4, 9.

⁴ 2 Pet. iii. 13.

of the Book of Revelation, shall be the signal for the close of that which is; and that this purpose and determination of God is good news to His servants.

The language is largely borrowed from the prophet Daniel. The very question which we have regarded as the key to this chapter is there to be found in words: *How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?* And then the answer itself: *And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he lift up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by Him that liveth for ever, that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when He shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel; for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end*¹. How beautiful an illustration of that which St Peter describes as the condition of God's prophets in old time, *enquiring and searching diligently, searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify*, and obliged to content themselves with the knowledge that *not unto themselves but unto us they did minister the things*² which they darkly uttered!

*And*³ *the voice which I before heard out of the heaven, I heard it again talking with me, and saying, Go, take the little roll which is opened in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth. And*⁴ *I went away to*

¹ Dan. xii. 6—9.

² Verse 8.

³ 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

⁴ Verse 9.

the angel, telling him to give me the little roll. And he saith to me, Take and eat it up: and it shall make thy inward part bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be as sweet as honey. And¹ I took the little roll out of the hand of the angel, and ate it up: and it was in my mouth as honey sweet; and when I ate it, my inward part was made bitter. And² they say to me, that is, it was said to me, Thou must again, as before in the vision of the seals and of the trumpets, prophesy with regard to peoples and with regard to nations and tongues and kings many. And the little roll is no doubt the word of this coming prophecy; even of the prophecies which are to follow in subsequent chapters of this Book.

Here also we shall be reminded of an earlier prophet, Ezekiel. *Be not thou rebellious, like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me: and lo, a roll of a book was therein...and there was written therein lamentations and mourning and woe³...So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that roll...and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness...Moreover, He said unto me—here is the explanation of the symbolical act—all my words that I shall speak unto thee, receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears: and go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God⁴.* He who would carry God's words to another must first be impressed and penetrated with them himself. He must

¹ Verse 10.

² Verse 11.

³ Ezek. ii. 8—10.

⁴ Ezek. iii. 2, 3, 10, 11.

not only *hear, read, mark, and learn*, but also (according to the Scriptural figure) *inwardly digest them*. *Thy words*, another Prophet says, *were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart*¹. *How sweet*, the Psalmist says, *are Thy words unto my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth*². And yet this same word which is sweet to the taste is found afterwards bitter in the digestion. Ezekiel himself, in a verse closely following upon those already quoted, tells how *the spirit lifted him up, and took him away, and he went in bitterness, in the heat of his spirit*³. The very sweetness of the divine revelation has an after-taste of bitterness in the thought of its bearing upon the world of man.

I would draw three grave lessons, in conclusion, from the words which have to-night occupied us.

1. The mystery of God is *a great deep*⁴. However much He reveals, there is more behind. The little book may be taken out of the Angel's hand, but the voices of the seven thunders are at the same moment sealed up from man.

Would to God, my brethren, that there were in us more of desire, more of curiosity, as to God's counsels! more of that spirit of which we read in an earlier portion of this book, when St John *wept much because no one was found worthy to open and to read the book*⁵ which was to tell of God! In all other matters we are inquisitive; we find it difficult to lay down at the call of more

¹ Jer. xv. 16.² Psalm cxix. 103.³ Ezek. iii. 14.⁴ Psalm xxxvi. 6.⁵ Rev. v. 3.

serious duty a narrative, true or fictitious, of the course of a human life: but of God's will and God's purposes, though they concern us, though we ourselves are the objects of them, we think we know enough without enquiry; they are *far above out of our sight*¹, and we care not whether they are brought to us or no.

Perhaps there are too many books in the world: it was perhaps better for men when the Bible was almost the only book accessible to them, and when the Bible itself was less cheap and common. We might almost say so, judging from what we see of the present, and from what we have heard of the past. But it would be an unthankful use of God's gifts, to charge their abundance with the guilt of our neglect. It is not a mere paucity of books which will drive men to the Bible: often has the Bible lain for weeks together unopened on the shelf of a house in which it was the only book. And amongst the most reverent and the most profound students of the Bible have been men who had at command all the treasures of literature and science. It is the heart, not the circumstances; it is the disposition of the mind towards God and towards duty, and not the absence of attractions drawing it elsewhere; which makes a man care for that which God has disclosed, and strive to penetrate into mysteries which lie not on the surface of Revelation.

I doubt not there are present to-night some who bitterly lament, and some who strongly accuse them-

¹ Psalm x. 5.

selves of, a want of interest in God's Word. They would it were otherwise ; but they do not find it attractive, and they do not find it instructive. It is so with many : it has been so at certain times with all of us.

One thing we may say with confidence ; that no man ever lost interest in the Bible by a too frequent or a too devoted study. Those who do not find it attractive are those who for some reason, or for no reason beyond mere carelessness, have never given it a chance : they read it only as a form, and a form will it remain to them. Let us dig deep ; let us read it, as we can, late and early ; and God will not allow it to be to us for long a dry or a repulsive study. *O how love I Thy law*, the Psalmist says : and why ? do not the words which follow suggest a reason for this ? *It is my meditation all the day*¹. *His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night*².

2. This passage suggests to us another peculiarity of the Word of God. It has two opposite effects. In the mouth it is sweet : in the digestion it is bitter.

Neither of these effects is wrought in a careless or indifferent reader. Both alike presuppose one who receives the Revelation with his whole heart.

It was in my mouth sweet as honey. And yet to St John, as of old to Ezekiel, it was a revelation of judgment. *It was written within and without ; and there was written therein lamentations and mourning and woe*³. What was there to make its first taste sweet ? There was this : it was a communication from

¹ Psalm cxix. 97.

² Psalm i. 2.

³ Ezek. ii. 10.

God to one who loved God. It is a joy to the faithful to hear God's voice at all; to be His organ and His minister for any purpose: so entire is the approval of their heart for whatever God has spoken, so truly do they lose themselves in Him, and learn to measure things not by their own standard but by His, that the sound is attractive even in its sterner accents, and the cup of wormwood, if a divine hand has mixed it, is in their mouth sweet as honey. Whatever God says they know to be *holy and just and good*¹; whatever He does they feel to be guided by unerring wisdom and by perfect righteousness; even where He threatens, or even when He executes judgment, they know that a necessity of which He is the judge, a necessity which they can trust and which already they can partially appreciate, has prompted and enforced it: nay, if He requires them, as He required His prophets of old, to carry the message of denunciation; or if He requires them, as He required warriors and kings of old, or those who *bear the sword*² of justice now, to take part in its execution; still they can feel that the word is righteous, the duty imperious if painful, and the cause of God's truth higher and nobler than the instincts of nature or the yearnings of affection.

And this is applicable to all Christians. We ought to receive and to ponder God's whole revelation; not its gentler and softer parts only, but those which are sadder and sterner too; not those verses or chapters only which tell of unconditional forgiveness and illimit-

¹ Rom. vii. 12.

² Rom. xiii. 4.

able mercy, but those also which ring the knell of sin and disclose to an incredulous world the future punishment of the wicked. It is not because it is a joyful message, but because it is God's message, that the revelation is *sweeter than honey and the honeycomb*¹ to him who loves God. It is the being spoken to at all by Him, which is the joy and the glory. It is the being in communication at all with the source of light, with the fountain-head of truth; it is the being fed out of the heavenly store, and dealt with as one cared for by Him who is life and love; it is this which the faithful servant, it is this which the reverent son, regards as above price, and accepts in every part with adoring gratitude.

This too explains to us why to many the Word of Revelation is a sealed book; why it awakens no inquisitiveness and conveys no satisfaction. It is because they cannot realize God as speaking in it. It is because the mists of worldliness or of unbelief or of sin have so spread themselves over the heart, that the vision of the Divine Speaker is clouded and obscured². Hence the necessity for honest dealing with ourselves; hence the demand for quiet thought and secluded meditation; hence the call to *commune with our own heart, and in our chamber, and to be still*³; hence the cruelty of those who strew our way with stumblingblocks of doubt, and hedge it with thorns of unbelief, when they ought rather to be using all diligence to *strengthen the feeble knees*⁴

¹ Psalm xix. 10.

² 2 Cor. iv. 4.

³ Psalm iv. 4 (Prayer-Book Version).

⁴ Isai. xxxv. 3.

and to point upwards the drooping eye, to show how near God is to man, and how powerful, even in its secrecy, the working of His Spirit.

The word was sweet in the prophet's mouth: but in its after-taste it was bitter. How can one who cares for man, as God, as Christ, teaches him to care, rejoice with unmixed joy in the message which comes to him from above? It is God's message, and it is sweet to hear God speak: it is God's message, and it is glory and joy enough to be permitted to receive and to hand it on. But when he reflects what must be the consequences of a slighted mercy, of a despised cross, of a refused Spirit; and then sees how many of his fellow-creatures, of those who are of one nature and one blood with him, are slighting God's mercy, are doing despite to the Saviour's cross, are refusing and at last utterly quenching Christ's Holy Spirit; can it be, ought it to be, without some dash of bitterness that he drinks the cup of truth and eats the bread of divine knowledge? Did not Apostles and Prophets, did not his Saviour Himself, go before him in this experience? Did not his Lord weep over Jerusalem? Did not St Paul say that he *could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren*¹? Yes, these are just and holy thoughts; consistent with an entire approval of the ways of God, and with the deepest sense of the justice and goodness of each one of God's words.

3. There is a third and last lesson taught in the

¹ Rom. ix. 3.

chapter on which we have dwelt. It is drawn from a word not fully rendered in our Version; that which says that the message which declares to God's servants the approach of the end is a message of glad tidings. *Then is the mystery of God finished, as He evangelized His servants the prophets.*

There is much in this life which a true Christian cannot see without uneasiness. God is dishonoured, *God is provoked, every day*¹. The triumph of good is delayed, the boastings of evil are emboldened, and there is nothing to be said but that *the Lord hath spoken*, and that they who believe in Him are sure that *He will also bring it to pass*². But the voice of the scoffer is loud and insolent, *Where is the promise of His coming? All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*³: why should change ever come? That is why the message of the Angel is a Gospel. *In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, whenever he is about to sound, then is the mystery of God finished.* It is the art of the unbeliever to turn God's longsuffering, whereby He gives *space for repentance*⁴, into an argument for the non-fulfilment of God's promise. How sad! how ungrateful! *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is longsuffering to us-ward*⁵. The course of nature has long been uninterrupted: is the God of nature therefore powerless to interrupt it? *The times of this ignorance God winked at*⁶: is it therefore not within His power to cut them short?

¹ Psalm vii. 12 (Prayer-Book Version).

² Isai. xlii. 11.

³ 2 Pet. iii. 4.

⁴ Rev. ii. 21.

⁵ 2 Pet. iii. 9.

⁶ Acts xvii. 30.

Brother, sister, wearied with the long provocations of the wicked, sad and sick at heart with the sophistries of unbelief and with the insolences of ungodliness, yet take courage when thou hearest of *the days of the voice of the seventh angel who is about to sound! Then shall the mystery of God be finished. Then shall they that dwell in dust awake and sing*¹. Then shall the purposes of God be accomplished, and *His ways finally justified to man.*

My brethren, are we so decidedly on God's side, as that that catastrophe will be to us gain? On which side are we? *Who is on the Lord's side*²? who? Not he who is entangled in *the lusts of the flesh*³, and is pleading the strength of a young man's passions as a sufficient excuse for gratifying them. Not he who is immersed in the calculations of business, and making *the cares of this world*⁴ a reason for taking no thought for eternity. Not he who is satisfied with *a form of godliness*, but in heart and life is *denying its power*⁵. For these it had been well if this life were all. For these there is no gospel in the prophecy of the completion of *the mystery of God*. Better were it for them that the end were indefinitely postponed. Better for them that there were no end, or that they, *like the beasts that perish*⁶, might be excused from participation in it. But the voice sounds, the oath is ratified in heaven, *In the days of the voice of the seventh angel the mystery of God shall be accomplished.*

God give to many of us grace to pass the boundary

¹ Isai. xxvi. 19.

² Exod. xxxii. 26.

³ 2 Pet. ii. 18.

⁴ Mark iv. 19.

⁵ 2 Tim. iii. 5.

⁶ Psalm xlix. 12.

line between darkness and light, between death and life, between *the power of Satan*¹ and *the glorious liberty of the sons of God*²! Then, then only, shall we know what rest is, what peace, what hope. And in the coming to Christ is the crossing of that line. *He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life*³. So simple, so decisive! O why not more? Why so small a company? Pray, pray—for that we can all do—that He *in whom we are not straitened*⁴ may pour out largely of His grace upon the ministers and upon the congregation, that we may speak in faith and also hear in faith; may believe that which He reveals, and love that which He promises; so that there may be *added daily to His true Church amongst us such as shall be saved*⁵!

¹ Acts xxvi. 18.² Rom. viii. 21.³ John v. 24.⁴ 2 Cor. vi. 12.⁵ Acts ii. 47.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
June 9, 1861.

LECTURE XVIII.

REVELATION XI. 12.

*And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them,
Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a
cloud: and their enemies beheld them.*

How does the Church stand related to the foregoing predictions of judgment? Will the *overflowings of ungodliness*¹ entirely submerge it? *When the Son of Man cometh, will He find any faith on the earth*²? and how much? What proportion of His professed servants will have remained unaffected by the prevailing unbelief, at last (it may be) the triumphant infidelity, of the world which surrounds them? And what will be the condition, what the work, what the success, what the end nearer or more remote, of the *faithful among the faithless*? These are some of the questions which may naturally have arisen out of preceding disclosures, and to which we may conceive the section now opening before us to contain an answer.

¹ Psalm xviii. 3 (Prayer-Book Version).

² Luke xviii. 8.

And¹ there was given me a reed like a measuring rod, one saying—the act was accompanied by a voice, we read not whose voice, saying—Arise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein, in the temple.

There is another passage, in the 21st chapter, where this act of measuring is repeated. *And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof².* The original of both passages is found in the 40th chapter of the Prophet Ezekiel; when *in the visions of God* the prophet was brought from the place of his captivity *into the land of Israel, and set upon a very high mountain, and, behold, there was a man... with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed: and he stood in the gate³.* The line of flax, or thread, was for measuring larger distances; the reed for the measurement of buildings. And then there follows a detailed account of the measurement in vision of the temple at Jerusalem, giving assurance to the captive Israelites of a coming day of national restoration.

Since Ezekiel wrote, a new meaning had been given to God's temple. Even before Jerusalem was destroyed, even while the material temple was still standing—how much more now, when (as we believe) the sword of Roman conquest had already done its work upon the holy city and its sanctuary—the name of the temple of God had been transferred from the building on Mount Zion to the living community of believing men. Take a single

¹ Verse 1.

² Rev. xxi. 15.

³ Ezek. xl. 2, 3.

example (out of many) from St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*¹. *The temple of God is holy; which temple ye are*².

Now to measure this temple is to mark out its extent; to ascertain how much (if I might so express it) is temple; what are the dimensions, what the limits, of that which is really holy. Like the very different yet not wholly divergent vision of the sealing, it is the object of this passage to indicate the safety, because the indelible consecration, of God's true servants; the certainty that there will always be upon earth, in the worst of times, in the most degenerate of nations, a little remnant of *called, and chosen, and faithful*³; always a true shrine in which these worship apart from *the strife of tongues*⁴, and an accepted altar of burnt-offering on which lives and souls are constantly dedicated through the mediation of the one High Priest, and in virtue of His one sacrifice⁵.

*And*⁶ *the court that is outside the temple cast forth without, leave out of the reckoning, and measure it not.* There are two words in the original language both rendered *temple* in our Authorised Version. One of these—constantly used in the Gospels and Acts, when we read

¹ Eph. ii. 19—21.

² 1 Cor. iii. 17.

³ Rev. xvii. 14.

⁴ Psalm xxxi. 20.

⁵ Heb. vii. 24, 27.

⁶ Verse 2.

that Jesus Himself, or His disciples afterwards, *went up into the temple and taught*¹—includes all the sacred precincts, the temple itself and its courts: the other denotes the actual building, what may be called the shrine, only; and is the word always used in the more solemn sense already referred to, namely, that spiritual temple which is, under the Christian dispensation, the true house and dwelling-place of God². Here then the prophet is directed to measure the shrine, the actual building of the temple, but to leave out the court which is outside the shrine. *For it was given by the word of Christ to the nations, and they shall trample on the holy city during forty and two months.*

The words are borrowed from our Lord's own prophecy in the 21st chapter of the Gospel by St Luke. *And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*³. When we translate the temple into its Christian sense; when we understand by Jerusalem *the city of the living God*⁴, and by the Jewish people *the Israel of God*⁵; we must also regard the Gentiles here spoken of, not in the first meaning of the term, as nations that belong not to the natural Israel, but rather as those who are not of the true seed of Abraham, not men of faith, not Christians indeed: and we shall see in the prediction here given the announcement of a desecration of that body which ought to be, and by profession is, all holy, by the admixture of many who belong not in heart and life to it.

¹ John vii. 14.² 2 Cor. vi. 16.³ Luke xxi. 24.⁴ Heb. xii. 22.⁵ Gal. vi. 16.

The shrine is to be measured : the court is to be left out. There shall always be a true Church, a true spiritual divine temple : but there shall be appended to it a larger space which must be described rather as an outer court of that temple, a community which partakes not in the true worship of devotion and self-dedication, and which, whatever its profession and whatever its name, is in reality a multitude without grace and without vitality.

And this desecration of the temple-court is described as lasting for forty and two months. This is a period which often recurs, though in different shapes, in prophecy. Forty-two months make up a period of three years and a half ; a period also of twelve hundred and sixty days. This is probably the idea of the saying of the prophet Daniel in his 7th chapter, *a time and times and the dividing of time*¹ ; or again, in the 12th, *a time, times, and an half*². The three and a half, which is the half seven, is the symbol of a period broken and limited ; as the other, the number seven, is of a period complete and perfect.

Now during this period of partial corruption even within the sacred precincts, this treading down of the very courts of the temple by those who in reference to the real life of the Church *are not Israel* though they be *of Israel*³ ; what will be the position of that truth which it is the business of Christ's people to make known on earth ? that *truth* of which *the Church* is called in

¹ Dan. vii. 25.² Dan. xii. 7.³ Rom. ix. 6.

St Paul's 1st Epistle to Timothy *the pillar and ground*¹? The verses which follow will tell us.

*And*² *I will give to my two witnesses*: the speaker is God Himself: the words in the 1st verse, *And the angel stood*, which otherwise complicate the whole passage by seeming to claim for the angel a character which could not be his, are not found in the best copies, and you may have noticed that they were omitted in the rendering to-night given. *I will give to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy during a thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloths*, in garments of sackcloth.

Prophesy, you will remember, does not necessarily mean *predict*. It is telling forth, rather than foretelling. It is speaking God's words, for God, in the name and by the authority of God. It is the delivering God's message, whether of rebuke or of encouragement, of admonition or of prediction.

The period spoken of, twelve hundred and sixty days, is the same with that already noticed; the forty-two months; the three years and a half; the time, times, and half a time.

The witnesses prophesy in sackcloth garments, because their function is one severe and full of sadness; because they must be *in the world*, yet *not of it*³; because their very garb and demeanour must *testify against it*, whether in its antichristian or in its nominally Christian part, *that the works thereof are evil*⁴. This was the dress

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 15.

² Verse 3.

³ John xvii. 11, 14.

⁴ John vii. 7.

of Elijah in his days; *girt with a girdle of leather about his loins*¹. This was the dress of him who came afterwards *in the spirit and power of Elias*²; *the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey*³. The special witnesses of God in a luxurious and self-pleasing age are often marked out from the world by signs of self-denial, of austerity, and even of isolation.

Who then, you will ask, are the two witnesses here described? Let us complete their portraiture before we give such answer as we may to that question.

*These*⁴ *men are the two olive-trees, and the two candlesticks, which stand in the presence of the Lord of the earth.*

The figure is that of the prophet Zechariah. *And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold, a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his (its) seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof: and two olive-trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof*⁵. *Then answered I and said unto him, What are these two olive-trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me*

¹ 2 Kings i. 8.

² Luke i. 17.

³ Matt. iii. 4.

⁴ Verse 4.

⁵ Zech. iv. 1—3.

*and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth*¹.

The witnesses here are said to be *the two olive-trees and the two candlesticks which stand before the Lord of the earth*. And the vision of Zechariah has taught us to connect the two emblems. The olive-trees are the feeders of the lamps. *Through the two golden pipes they empty the golden oil out of themselves* into the lights which shine before God. How glorious a description of the office of the earthly witnesses! They are channels of grace, and they are concentrations of light. The Church in her darkest times shall not lack, has not lacked, these. Woe be to the witnesses who are neither, who are not both, of these things! Woe be to them if they forget their office of feeding the Church's lamps! woe be to them if they forget their office of shining brightly before her with their own!

But we have still to pursue the description.

*And*² *if any one wills (desires) to injure them, the two witnesses, fire goes forth out of their mouth, and devours their enemies: and if any one wills (desires) to injure them, thus must he be slain. These*³ *have authority to shut the heaven, that rain may not wet the ground during the days of their prophesying: and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth in (with) every stroke (or plague) as often as they will.*

The witnesses are men of like infirmities with others⁴, but they are endued in virtue of their commission with a

¹ Zech. iv. 11—14.

² Verse 5.

³ Verse 6.

⁴ Acts xiv. 15.

supernatural, an irresistible strength. To them are here ascribed some of the separate acts of God's illustrious witnesses of old. Like Moses, they can *smite the waters; and all the waters in the river* which fertilizes Egypt *shall be turned straightway into blood*¹. Like Elijah, they can say to the wicked and idolatrous king, *There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word*²: and it shall *not rain on the earth by the space of three years and six months*³. Like the same great prophet, they can say to the armed company that comes out for their capture, *If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty*⁴. These are samples of the power of the witnesses; instances taken from the history of the past, and transferred into the region of the future. The power which is in the witnesses, the true witnesses whoever they be, is God's power; therefore it is infinite; therefore, if He will, He can make its applications also the same; therefore, if He will, He can exert in a different form, yet with results equally marvellous, that power which in all ages is the same; the same in its origin, the same also in its end.

*And*⁵ *when they shall have finished their testimony, the wild beast which goes up out of the abyss shall make war with them and conquer them and kill them: And*⁶ *their corpse is upon the street of the great city, which is called spiritually, that is, figuratively, Sodom, and Egypt, where their Lord also was crucified. And*⁷ *certain of the peoples*

¹ Exod. vii. 20.² 1 Kings xvii. 1.³ James v. 17.⁴ 2 Kings i. 10.⁵ Verse 7.⁶ Verse 8.⁷ Verse 9.

and tribes and tongues and nations look upon their corpse during three days and a half, and suffer not their corpses to be put into a tomb. And¹ they that dwell upon the earth rejoice over them and make merry, and shall send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tortured them that dwell on the earth.

We heard of *the abyss* in the 9th chapter. *The wild beast from the abyss* is an anticipation here of the 17th chapter. It may be enough at present to say that the spirit of persecution is the evil spirit in its aspect of brute violence. This *wild beast from the abyss* makes war, in one form or another, upon the witnesses, and gains a short-lived triumph. But not until *they have finished their testimony*: God suffers them not to be silenced till their work for Him is done. *Because his hour was not yet come²* is as much a reason for the failure of an aggression upon Christ's servant, as upon Christ Himself.

The place of their fall, when it is permitted, is the street of that world which is called Sodom for its wickedness; Egypt, as the scene of Israel's bondage; and Jerusalem, for its murder of the Lord. Yes, the world is the same in all ages: the mode and form of its persecutions may vary; but the root of all its persecutions, hatred of the condemning holiness of Christ, is invariable and constant.

And there is a triumph over the fall of Christ's witnesses. The world rejoices over them, as one after another they pass away from the scene of their testimony;

¹ Verse 10.

² John vii. 30.

for deeply had the sting of their words and the sting of their deeds, the reproof of their Gospel and the reproof of their example, entered into the souls of their despisers and their adversaries: it had been a torture to them, though they carried it well before one another; there was a voice in them which echoed its voice, the voice of a convicting conscience, and the voice of an anticipated judgment. For three days and a half, for the half of the seven, for a period short and incomplete, the triumph of the world, the dance around the corpses, is suffered to continue: men send gifts one to another, as in a day of feasting and of joy over glad tidings¹: *Herod and Pilate, before at enmity, are made friends together*² in their time of triumph: then the scene changes.

*And*³ *after the three days and a half, a spirit of life out of God entered in them, and they stood upon their feet; and a great fear fell upon those who beheld them. And*⁴ *I heard a great voice out of the heaven saying to them, Ascend hither. And they ascended into the heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And*⁵ *in that hour there became (took place) a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and there were slain in the earthquake names (persons) of men (human beings) seven thousand; and the rest became affrighted, and gave glory to the God of the heaven.*

*The*⁶ *second Woe is gone: the third Woe, behold, cometh quickly.*

We observe in the description here given a remain-

¹ Esther ix. 22.

² Luke xxiii. 12.

³ Verse 11.

⁴ Verse 12.

⁵ Verse 13.

⁶ Verse 14.

ing feature of the history of Elijah : the *chariot of fire and horses of fire*¹, by which he was at last taken up, have left their mark upon the prophecy of the two witnesses. But we have also a close analogy to the order of our Lord's own history. A season of testimony: at last the hour is come; the serpent *bruises the heel*²; the body lies upon the earth: after three days a spirit of life reenters it; death is followed by resurrection, and resurrection by ascension. Even thus is it with the most faithful of His witnesses. Their names for a time may be *cast out as evil*³; their word is slighted, their work frustrated, their fall hailed with rejoicing: but there comes for them a *morning of joy* after this *night of weeping*⁴; their cause triumphs, though they may be no more; their memory revives, and is honoured when honour can no more elate: they themselves are in the heavenly mansions: already rest, hereafter glory!

Nor is it without many premonitory judgments that their earthly work is suffered to pass from the earth. *The tenth part of the city fell...there were slain of men seven thousand...the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.* Yes, God *leaves not* His witnesses *without witness*⁵: from time to time He *makes them honourable*⁶ and He makes them formidable; formidable in the human conscience, formidable too in the world which looks on.

And do we ask now, as so many have asked before us, Who are the two witnesses? Are they Moses and

¹ 2 Kings ii. 11.

² Gen. iii. 15.

³ Luke vi. 22.

⁴ Psalm xxx. 5.

⁵ Acts xiv. 17.

⁶ Isai. xlii. 21.

Aaron? Are they Caleb and Joshua? Are they Moses and Elijah? Are they Zerubbabel and Joshua? Are they Luther and Melancthon? Are they—stranger questions still—are they the two Dispensations, the Law and the Gospel? Are they the two Testaments, the Old Testament and the New? Has not the very reading of the passage silenced some of these questions, and widened, enlarged, amplified, and elevated the rest? Yes, the witnesses are in one sense ideal, but in another sense they are real persons: they are the witnesses of revelation, the witnesses of truth, the witnesses of the Gospel, the witnesses of God, the witnesses of Christ, in every age: personified here as two in number, as though in memory of Him who sent forth His first disciples not one by one but *two and two*¹; as though to encourage the faithful witness of each age, we might say of each place and of each house, when he deems himself forsaken, with the assurance that he is *not alone*²; not alone really in reference to human companionship, any more than in reference to that heavenly presence which is the essence of his strength and the fountainhead of his courage.

Moses and Elijah appeared together on the mount of transfiguration as the representatives of the witnessing grace of the Old Testament. Not less did they foreshadow the like characteristic of the New. Happy they who are permitted to feel themselves not alone in their testimony! to be conscious, even when they hear it not outwardly, of the voice of human as of divine sympathy,

¹ Luke x. 1.

² John xvi. 32.

and to recognize in it the fulfilment of His promise who said, *I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy!*

I have referred you oftentimes, in proof of interpretations of this Book here given, to the words of our Lord Himself in the 24th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel. Let me do so yet once more. See how conclusively the seal of His authority is set to the view here presented.

We have heard of wars and rumours of wars; nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And now we have heard of defections within the Church itself; an outer court trodden down, as well as an inner shrine measured. And then of a witness borne through twelve hundred and sixty days by messengers clothed in the garb of sorrow and of rebuke. Listen now to these few verses. *Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars ...All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up...And ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Thus is the outer court of the temple gradually desecrated. One encroachment after another has diminished the sacred area. Mutual betrayal, mutual hatred, deception from within, abounding iniquity, love waxing cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved¹. Measure still for preservation the temple of God, and the altar, and them*

¹ Matt. xxiv. 6, 8—13.

that worship therein. There is a remnant still of the faithful. Notice what next follows. *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness, the exact word here employed, unto all nations; and then shall the end come*¹. The two witnesses must raise the voice of their prophesying during the interval longer or shorter, the symbolical three years and a half, forty and two months, or twelve hundred and sixty days, of mingled fidelity and defection, of a measured shrine and a trampled court; and then, then at length, *in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, who is about to sound, then shall the end come; then shall the mystery of God be finished even as He evangelized His servants the prophets.* Such is the consistency, such the harmony, such the unity, of the Word of God.

The passage on which we have dwelt is in many points of view a solemn and discriminating revelation. Which is our dwelling-place in the holy city? the shrine, or the court? the part measured for sanctity, or the part abandoned for desecration? We cannot answer. The language is too figurative. Then read it thus. How do we stand towards the two witnesses? towards those who in our day are bearing witness in the world for God? We will hope that the ministers of the Church are amongst them; at all events, whatever they be personally—and God is the Judge—the message they carry is a divine message; if not personally, yet officially, in virtue of the Word they preach and the Sacraments they administer, they are the olive-trees of God's grace, and the

¹ Matt. xxiv. 14.

candlesticks of God's light; they are charged with God's commission, and they offer to you God's salvation. How do you receive it? We read here of *the two prophets tormenting them that dwell on the earth*. If the Word is faithful, it will torment as well as comfort. It will leave a sting in careless, worldly, sinful hearts; it will awaken an echo there, just because the heart of man and the Word of God answer the one to the other; because He who sends the word made the heart, and never leaves Himself without witness in the latter when He speaks to us in the former.

I am persuaded, my brethren, that there are some here present whom the two prophets torment. I am quite sure that there are those amongst us who come hither week by week to be tormented by God's Word. It reads them to themselves. It speaks as one that has eyes and hands. It is no blind, darkling message, groping about for the chance of finding. It is no feeble, irresolute, tentative message, catching at men and grasping shadows. No, it is *quick and powerful*¹; it goes straight to the conscience, making many a Felix *tremble*², and many an Agrippa resolve *almost to be a Christian*³. But remember, it may do all this and yet not save your soul. O for that one little step which yet remains to be taken; that actual *arising and going to your Father*⁴; that real *coming to Christ that you may have life*⁵! If the Word torments, it is only that it may arouse you to listen; it is only that you may take it to you as your

¹ Heb. iv. 12.² Acts xxiv. 25.³ Acts xxvi. 28.⁴ Luke xv. 18.⁵ John v. 40.

guide, your light, and your comforter. Be assured that it will be for your happiness to give it entrance. The witnesses may be feeble men; they may speak oftentimes to unthinking audiences, who put them aside contemptuously and no harm happens. But for all that they have God's power as well as God's authority with them; and after their brief day (it may be) of contempt and blasphemy they, their word at any rate, will be called to *ascend in the cloud, their enemies beholding*. Trifle not, my brethren, now with that word which must one day judge you! Every work spoken to you from this place in the name of Christ will have to be accounted for: not only so; *the word itself*, He says, *shall judge you in the last day*¹. May He give it entrance, while it is still light and not fire; a light to cheer and to enlighten, not a fire to scorch and to consume!

We are in the pause between two trumpets: six blasts have sounded; the seventh is yet to come. When it comes, it will be the end; the end of *this world*, the beginning of *that world*²; the close of time, the dawn of eternity. Take heed *lest, coming suddenly, it find you sleeping*³! *The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer*⁴. *The second Woe is past: behold, the third Woe cometh quickly!*

¹ John xii. 48.² Luke xx. 34, 35.³ Mark xiii. 36.⁴ 1 Pet. iv. 7.

LECTURE XIX.

REVELATION XI. 19.

And the temple of God was opened in heaven: and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament.

FOUR Lectures have already been devoted to that section of the Book of Revelation which we complete this evening. The vision of the seven trumpets represents to us in a sacred allegory the ancient story of the siege of Jericho. The great city with its walls and bulwarks before which the little army of the faithful is encamped, and which must fall before they can gain entrance into the heavenly Canaan, is now the world of sin, of apostasy, of unbelief; the world, calling itself by different names in different centuries, but uniform and unchanged through all ages at least in this, that *it is not subject to the law of God*¹, and is not on the side of Christ in His warfare against the enemies of human good and human happiness. Against this world, changing ever in its form,

¹ Rom. viii. 7.

but unchanged and unchangeable in its deep inner principles, the Church which is Christ's army has to make war in Christ's name. And how? When does the Church wage a right and a successful war against this world? Not when she borrows its weapons, of deceit or violence, of *anger and clamour and evilspeaking*¹, or else of insidious guile and *cunning craftiness*². Not thus was Israel of old, the Church's type and pattern, taught to deal with opposing hosts or frowning ramparts. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? Before my servant, before my people, before the ark of my covenant, before my word and my will and my outstretched arm, thou shalt become a plain*³. Let the priests carry forth out of the camp the sacred ark; let seven priests go before it sounding their seven trumpets; thus let them do six days, and on the seventh day thus let them do seven times; and at the seventh time of compassing the city on that seventh day, at the prolonged sound of the last trumpet, *the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, so that the people may go up, every man straight before him*⁴, and find every obstacle vanished and gone; *for the battle is the Lord's*⁵, and the cause of His Church is His cause.

And we have read of the blowing of those six blasts by which through long ages the final triumph of good has been prepared and heralded. We have heard of one

¹ Eph. iv. 31.² Eph. iv. 14.³ Zech. iv. 6, 7.⁴ Josh. vi. 5.⁵ 1 Sam. xvii. 47.

judgment after another befalling *the world of the ungodly*¹; judgments by which antichristian powers have been successively weakened, and ungodly lives individually humbled. We sought not to personify or to localize where God has not thus limited the sphere and scope of His judgments: we have been satisfied to say that thus and thus in kind and in purpose it has been again and again aforetime, that thus and thus in kind and in purpose it shall be again so long as there remains one enemy unsubdued or one element of evil erect and not prostrated before Christ. But we read in the 10th chapter a solemn prediction that thus it shall not be for ever; that this mixed scene is not destined to permanence; that at a day fixed already in God's counsels there shall be an end, *there shall be time*, that is, delay, *no longer*, the mystery of God has an end, and that end shall not always tarry. *God is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance... One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day... But the day of the Lord will come, and come as a thief in the night*². This assurance we have understood to be the direct object of the former of the two interludes between the sounding of the sixth trumpet and of the seventh.

And on last Sunday evening we entered into the meaning of the latter of these two interludes, that of the two witnesses. We noticed how exact is the parallelism, in this point as in every other, between the pro-

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 5.

² 2 Pet. iii. 8—10.

phesies entrusted to St John in this Book of Revelation and the memorable prediction uttered by our Lord Himself at the close of His ministry upon earth. The two witnesses described in the earlier half of this chapter as prophesying, that is, speaking for God, in a garb of penitence and mourning during the three years and a half, the forty-two months, or the twelve hundred and sixty days of the Church's partial unfaithfulness; a period designated by the twofold characteristic of an inner shrine measured for preservation and an outer court abandoned to desecration; those two witnesses who *have power with God*¹ through the prevalence of prayer, and power from God to work His wonderful works on an incredulous and a gainsaying world; who are overcome at last *when they have finished their testimony* by the forces of evil, and yet at the very moment of their seeming discomfiture are bidden to ascend to heaven, like their Lord, in the very sight of their enemies; what are these but the impersonation of that witnessing power of which our Lord Himself spoke when He said, that, while many within His Church should be deceived, and many offended; while *iniquity should abound* and *the love of many wax cold*; while nevertheless there should be, like the measured temple of this vision, those amongst His people who should *endure to the end* and *be saved*; while all this is going on in His Church and in the world, *this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come*²?

¹ Gen. xxxii. 28.² Matt. xxiv. 12—14.

And to-night we reach the very prediction of that end; reach it, we may say, for the second time—for we were brought to the same limit by the vision of the seven seals—and yet, even now, not for the last time: there is more still to be told of the fortunes of Christ's earthly Church, and out of the completion of one line of prophecy will arise yet again the commencement of another.

The last words read to you from this place were the ominous words of the 14th verse. *The second Woe is past*: the allusion is to the last verse of the 8th chapter, where *an eagle* (not, as in our Version, *an angel*) *flying in mid heaven* is heard proclaiming with a loud cry, *Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels that are about to sound*¹! Thus at the end of the description of the consequences of the fifth trumpet we read again, *One Woe*, one of these three Woes, *is past, and behold, there come two Woes more hereafter*. And so here, when the sixth trumpet is over, with all that has followed it, in the episode of the little book and of the two witnesses, we have the final preparation for the sounding of the seventh trumpet in the words, *The second Woe is gone by: the third Woe, behold, cometh quickly*. *The third* is the effect, viewed in one aspect, in its bearing upon the world of sin, of the trumpet of the seventh Angel.

*And*² *the seventh angel sounded; and there became (arose, or ensued) great voices in the heaven, even persons*

¹ Rev. viii. 13.

² Verse 15.

saying—we know not whose voices; they are those of the inhabitants of heaven generally—*The kingdom, the dominion, or kingly government, of the world is become the possession of our Lord and of His Christ*—the expression is that of the 2nd Psalm, quoted in the 4th chapter of the Acts, *against the Lord and against His Anointed*¹, that is, His King—and *He shall reign unto the ages of the ages*. Up to this time there had been some semblance of truth in the insolent boast of the tempter, when, after showing to our Lord *all the kingdoms of the world* he declared, *All this power is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it*². But so shall it not be even in semblance always. At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the voices in heaven proclaim that the kingdom of the world has become visibly and actually that which it always was in right, the possession of God and of His Christ, and He, Christ, or God in Christ, shall reign for ever and ever. *The Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one*³.

And⁴ the twenty-four elders who in the presence of God were seated upon their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshipped God, saying⁵, *We thank Thee, O Lord, the God, the Almighty, He who is and He who was, because Thou hast received Thy great power and didst reign; and⁶ the nations were angered, and there came Thine anger, and the season of the dead to be judged, and the season to give their reward to Thy servants the prophets, and the saints,*

¹ Acts iv. 26.² Luke iv. 5, 6.³ Zech. xiv. 9.⁴ Verse 16.⁵ Verse 17.⁶ Verse 18.

and them that fear Thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy them that destroy the earth.

The twenty-four elders. The scenery of the 4th and 5th chapters still continues ; the council is still sitting in heaven upon the fortunes of earth ; with such additional features as we have from time to time noticed in the sections which followed. And here the adorations of the 5th chapter are renewed, in special acknowledgment of the assumption of universal dominion by the Lord and His Christ. The final establishment of God's kingdom on earth is felt as an *unspeakable gift*¹ in heaven.

Our version says, *Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come.* The last words, *and art to come*, though found in similar passages in the 1st and 4th chapters, are not found here ; and for this reason, that the coming is here no longer future : the establishment of God's kingdom here celebrated is the fulfilment and therefore the abrogation of that part of the divine title which describes Him as about to come.

Thou hast received, or taken to Thee, Thy great power. The power was always God's ; but He had not before set free all its energies to crush and to annihilate that which opposed itself. God *in times past*, so the Apostles Barnabas and Paul spoke at Lystra, *suffered all nations to walk in their own ways*, though *He left not Himself without witness*². The times of this ignorance, St Paul said at Athens, *God winked at : but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent ; because He hath*

¹ 2. Cor. ix. 15.

² Acts xiv. 16, 17.

*appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness*¹. That day is here described as come, and God reigns.

And the nations were angered. The language is again that of the 2nd Psalm. *Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed*². It has been a constant fretting against God's yoke, a constant rage against God's truth and God's holiness. That has been the brief history of all these long centuries. But this passage, like many others in Scripture, tells us that there shall be an aggravation, a concentration, of that anger towards *the time of the end*³. We shall hear more of it in the later portions of this Book.

And then upon this anger of the nations, thus gathered and aggravated, shall come down the more formidable and terrific anger of God. *The nations were angered, and there came Thine anger.* The contrast is that of St Paul's prophecy to the Thessalonians; *And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming*⁴.

And the season of the dead to be judged. We have heard in past chapters of many judgments upon the living: but now the season is come for the judgment of the dead. Therefore it is the last judgment; it is the time of the end. *There shall be a time of trouble*, it is

¹ Acts xvii. 30, 31.

² Psalm ii. 1, 2.

³ Dan. xii. 4, 9.

⁴ 2 Thess. ii. 8.

written in the book of Daniel, *such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time...And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*¹.

And to give their reward, that is, the due, the promised reward, *to Thy servants the prophets*. Just as we read in our Lord's own words, *He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet*, that is, because he is a prophet, *shall receive a prophet's reward*². He who has given up his heart first, and then his life, to being God's witness and God's representative on the earth, shall in no wise lose his reward in the day of God's kingdom.

But all cannot be God's prophets. Is there no wider designation than that? It is added, *and to the saints, and to them that fear Thy name, small and great*. The *saints* are those who are consecrated; those who are God's own; those who belong to Him, by His redemption first, and then by their own will and self-dedication. And they are further described as *those that fear God*. My brethren, it is an elementary description; it seems to have but little of a Gospel sound: but yet I would say, let us not despise it; and once again, let us not take it for granted! There is less in us than there ought to be of the fear of God; less in us than there ought to be of that reverence for His greatness and for His holiness and for His judgment, which would make us afraid of displeasing Him. *Perfect love indeed casteth out fear*³; but not until fear has done its work; not

¹ Dan. xii. 1, 2.

² Matt. x. 41.

³ 1 John iv. 18.

until fear has grown up into watchfulness, watchfulness into obedience, and obedience of life into oneness of will.

All cannot be God's prophets; but all can be His saints, because all can fear Him: yes, it is written, they are *both small and great*. Humble, insignificant, poor, and young; as well as rulers and teachers, as well as the rich and the honoured in their generation. Let none of us miss by our own carelessness that which is so freely ours by God's gift. *High and low, rich and poor; young men and maidens, old men and children; one with another*¹!

And to destroy those who destroy the earth. There is only one word in the original language for *destroying* and *corrupting*. Thus in one of St Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians, where our Version says, *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy*², the two words are one in the original text and in the marginal reading, *If any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy*. To defile is to destroy. To corrupt the earth is to destroy the earth. It is, to spoil God's work; to mar and to disfigure by its abuse that which God made all beautiful and all holy. See then what a sinful life is! See how God's enemies, that is, the ungodly and the sinful, are regarded in heaven! They destroy the earth. God meant everything for one use, and they turn everything to another use. God meant His creation to be enjoyed by His creatures; enjoyed with moderation, enjoyed with thankfulness, enjoyed in kindness, in tenderness, in love; and behold, we have gone forth to

¹ Psalm xlix. 2. cxlviii. 12.

² 1 Cor. iii. 17.

trample and to waste, to sully and to defile, to turn to selfish indulgence, to use as instruments of vile temptation, or as implements of unholy warfare, those things or those persons, those members and faculties, those bodies, those minds, those souls, which might have been and which ought to have been altogether applied to His service and made vocal with His praise. And now at last the season is come to destroy those who have thus destroyed the earth.

We must hasten to the last words of the passage.

And¹ the temple of God was opened in the heaven, and there was seen the ark of His covenant in His temple, and there became (took place, or ensued) lightnings and voices and thunders and a great hail.

The temple of God was opened. The secret place of His dwelling² was thrown wide open, giving sight, giving access, giving place and abode for men. That holiest of all³, into which in the days of old none entered save one only, once in each year, and even then with a fear and trembling, an accuracy of ceremonial and a scrupulosity of observance, scarcely less formidable than exclusion; that inner shrine of all is now seen by the Prophet unveiled and opened, and whoever will may enter. And this, not in a vision of the earthly temple, which was a shadow and figure of the true⁴, but of the heavenly temple itself; even of that abode of God Himself of which the Mosaic tabernacle was designed as the type, the testimony, and the memorial.

¹ Verse 19.

² Psalm xxvii. 5 (Prayer-Book Version).

³ Heb. ix. 3.

⁴ Heb. ix. 24.

And there was seen within this heavenly temple, thus at last thrown open, the ark of God's covenant. We all know what that sight must have been to an Israelite. In the early history of that nation, during its wandering in the wilderness, the ark was at once the centre of the collective life, and the focus of the divine presence. Where the ark rested, there was for the time the nation's home; when the ark moved, the nation must seek for itself a new home: when at last the nation had rest, the ark had a permanent home prepared for it, and thenceforth no eye but that of the high priest and once in each year, ever fell upon it. And now for several centuries the ark itself had been lost to Israel. From the day of the Babylonian conquest there had been no ark. *The glory of the latter house* was in this respect certainly less not *greater than of the former*¹, that the ark of the covenant was lost to it. The holy of holies was henceforth empty; a sign of national decay, a preparation for the withdrawal of national privileges. Now at length the eye of St John rests once again in vision upon the lost ark of his nation: he sees it in heaven, and he sees it disclosed to public gaze. There is no longer any enclosing wall, no longer a concealing curtain. What could this indicate but that the mystery of God is now finished, His secret told, His counsels accomplished, His work concerning man consummated? What could this indicate but the coming of the promised *refreshing from the presence of the Lord, of the times of restitution of all things*², of the recognition of the divine adoption,

¹ Hag. ii. 9.² Acts iii. 19, 21.

of the *manifestation of the sons of God*¹? The ark was the symbol of the divine presence, of the divine favour, of the divine protection. Its disclosure in the open temple tells of the unveiling of that mystery which has till now enveloped the condition of His people, and the declaration before men and angels that they are what they are.

The sight of the ark was, if we might so speak, the natural end of the section of the seven trumpets. It was the ark which took Jericho; no arm of flesh, but only that symbol of the divine strength and presence. If we had before doubted the allusion here to that portion of the history of Israel, the mention of the ark would have gone far to establish it. It assures the true Israel of the protection of Him *in whom is everlasting strength*². It says, As certainly as the walls of Jericho fell of old before the material ark of God, so surely shall all the powers of sin, the world, and the devil, be broken and perish before that word and that will which is pledged to give you the victory.

And there were lightnings and voices and thunders and a great hail. The day of the recognition of the sons of God must be a fearful day for His enemies and their persecutors. *A day of darkness and of gloominess*³; a day of judgment too, and of confusion and contempt.

And thus the curtain falls for the second time upon the great drama. The succession of the seven trumpets, like that of the seven seals, has brought us to the end of time, and if further disclosures are yet to be vouchsafed

¹ Rom. viii. 19.

² Isai. xxvi. 4.

³ Joel ii. 2.

to us, they must take up the plot again at a point higher than the catastrophe.

For the present, what shall we learn from the accompaniments and consequences, as here detailed to us, of the sounding of the seventh trumpet?

We pray day by day, *Thy kingdom come*¹. Have we ever stayed to think what will be when God at last grants that prayer? We often speak of the ways in which we may promote God's kingdom; by seeking His glory and obeying His will in our daily lives, or by aiding those machineries which are at work in the world for its improvement or evangelization. Have we ever thought what it will be when God's kingdom is come? What will be left then of this life, of this world, which is now so much to all of us, which is now all in all to many? In other words, How much of our present lives is entirely holy and heavenly? how much can survive the wreck of earth, and be transferred into a world in which God is all?

Do none of us, to speak honestly, prefer the present mixed state; the state in which God, in which Christ, if He be anything, is at least not all; in which many things survive of which God cannot approve; in which almost everything which has place at all, has about it the leaven of the carnal, the earthly, and the transitory? Are we prepared, even willingly, much more gladly, to part with these things; with the *things which are seen*, with the things which are *temporal*²? Shall we ever *be satisfied, when we awake, with God's likeness*³?

¹ Matt. vi. 10.

² 2 Cor. iv. 18.

³ Psalm xvii. 15.

At present our sins find company, and our good deeds, if there be any, shine by contrast. At present we can flatter ourselves with the idea that we are better than many, and that none are perfect. We can *measure ourselves by ourselves, and compare ourselves among ourselves*¹, and derive some hope, if some reproof also, from that comparison. How will it be with us when saints and angels must be our companions, and when all that survives is perfectly pure?

At present we are familiarized by long use with many things which are not according to God's will; and few men live out their *threescore years and ten*² without finding their sensibilities somewhat blunted, and their estimate of the sinfulness of sin robbed of something of its severity. How shall we ever learn to echo that doxology of the elders, *We thank Thee, O Lord God Almighty, because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power, and because Thy kingdom is come?*

What a change, what a wonderful change, is implied in the announcement, *Thy kingdom is come!* If we are ever to learn that song, *what manner of persons ought we to be now in all holy conversation and godliness*³!

Yes, that is the lesson for us. Let God's kingdom come to us, to us personally; let it come now, that kingdom which is *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*⁴; that *kingdom of God which is within*⁵; in the secret heart that loves God, in the devoted life which does God service!

¹ 2 Cor. x. 12.² Psalm xc. 10.³ 2 Pet. iii. 11.⁴ Rom. xiv. 17.⁵ Luke xvii. 21.

If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear¹?

And then the ark seen—the ark of the covenant; the ark which testifies to God's faithfulness; the ark which is God's presence! How willingly at present do we dispense with that sight! How lightly sits upon our souls that captivity at Babylon in which the ark is altogether missing! How little care we if we spend a life-time *without Christ, without God, in the world²!*

And yet we shall miss Him one day. We shall feel it disconsolate to pass through an old age without Him; cold and blank to die without Him; terrible to stand before God without a Saviour in the judgment! May He give us grace to think of these things now; now, while it is still, we trust, *the accepted time*; now, while it is still not quite past *the day of salvation³!* May this night see some knee bowed before God which has long refused to bend; some heart softened which has long been obdurate! Not yet have begun those last voices that bespeak a closing age; those last thunderings which are the crash of worlds. Not yet has the Redeemer become the Judge, or the mercy-seat been exchanged for *the great white throne⁴*. While we have time, let us seek God! *Call ye upon Him while He is near⁵!*

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 18.

² Eph. ii. 12.

³ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

⁴ Rev. xx. 11.

⁵ Isai. lv. 6.

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